

KEEPING UP APPEARANCES:  
HOW THE SOVIET STATE FAILED TO CONTROL POPULAR ATTITUDES  
TOWARD THE UNITED STATES OF AMERICA, 1945-1959

by  
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## **ABSTRACT**

**RÓSA MAGNÚSDÓTTIR: Keeping Up Appearances: How the Soviet State Failed to Control Popular Attitudes Toward the United States of America, 1945-1959**  
(Under the direction of Donald J. Raleigh)

This dissertation explores perceptions of the United States of America in the Soviet Union from the April 1945 meeting of Soviet and American soldiers on the river Elbe in Germany to the September 1959 visit of Premier N. S. Khrushchev to America. It uses a large body of archival sources to uncover multiple discourses about America in the Soviet Union, arguing that the Soviet state's America myths helped create a positive counter-myth of America. Chapter 1 introduces the state-sponsored anti-American campaign during the Stalin years and some of its most active participants. Chapter 2 addresses the effectiveness of the anti-American campaign as it uncovers an unofficial counter-myth that mirrored the anti-American propaganda promoted by Soviet authorities. In Chapter 3, considers official American propaganda during the Stalin era and shows how it contributed to the popular counter-myth that greatly distressed Soviet authorities. Chapter 4 examines the restored cultural relations with the United States, with a focus on the revival of Soviet-American cultural exchanges in 1955. Finally, Chapter 5 looks at Khrushchev's efforts to celebrate Soviet socialism while trying to maintain social order and promote the concept of peaceful coexistence with the United States. I conclude by considering Soviet perceptions of the United States in the 1960s and beyond, speculating on the meaning and importance of the myth of America in the Soviet Union and, after 1991, in Russia.

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I conducted the research for this dissertation in national and local archives in Moscow. Many archivists helped me navigate the labyrinth of Russian archives, but I am most indebted to Vladimir Kozlov, historian and deputy director of the State Archive of the Russian Federation. In Moscow, I also enjoyed the company of fellow graduate students

from all over the United States, Germany, Austria, Italy, England, France, and Russia. The world of academia is small, and I look forward to meeting them again at future conferences or in the archives. In Mannheim, Irena Kogan had answers to all my questions about the intricacies of the Russian language, and in Chapel Hill, Jon Wallace read parts of the dissertation.

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I am blessed with many dear friendships and a supportive family. In the spirit of Soviet propagandists, I toast to friendship and peace among the nations and thank collectively my family and friends in Iceland, Denmark, Germany, France, the United States, and Russia. In all these countries, there are people who helped me more than they probably realize. They showed interest in what I was doing, strived to understand why I was doing it, and inspired and encouraged me with their own accomplishments.

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## Introduction

On April 25, 1945, on the banks of the river Elbe one hundred miles south of Berlin, Soviet soldiers advancing from Stalingrad in the east and American soldiers coming in from Normandy in the west met to cut the German army in half, signaling that the end of the Second World War was in sight. But the meeting on the Elbe did more than break up the German army. On this day, hundreds of Soviet and American soldiers experienced comradeship and solidarity they vowed never to forget. They exchanged handshakes, embraces, and gifts. Together, they played music, sang American songs, drank Russian vodka, and toasted to “the late President Roosevelt, President Truman, Prime Minister Churchill, Marshal Stalin, and ‘everlasting friendship’ between us all.”<sup>1</sup> On this spring day in April, the prospects for peace and friendship seemed endless. Soviet and American soldiers had no inkling that the “spirit of the Elbe” would be sacrificed in a superpower struggle between the former allies. Indeed, World War II was the last time Soviet Red Army soldiers and American GIs would rub shoulders in a joint military operation.<sup>2</sup>

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<sup>1</sup>Mark Scott, *Yanks Meet Reds: Recollections of U.S. and Soviet Vets from the Linkup in World War II* (Santa Barbara: Capra Press, 1988), 28. Official celebration of the Elbe linkup was on April 30, 1945. See Harold Denny, “Red Army Honors Hodges On Link-Up: Russians Serve an Elaborate Dinner to Celebrate Meeting of U.S. and Soviet Forces,” *The New York Times*, May 1, 1945, 4. For further recollections of the Elbe linkup, see Delbert E. Philpott and Donna Philpott, *Hands Across the Elbe: The Soviet-American Linkup* (Paducah, KY: Turner Publications, 1995). In this dissertation, references to America (or “Amerika”) only include the United States of America. The primary sources use either “Amerika,” “Soedinennye Shtaty Ameriki,” or “SShA” in talking about the United States.

<sup>2</sup>As of 1995, Russia cooperated with NATO in Bosnia and Herzegovina, providing troops for the Implementation Force (IFOR, later Stabilization Force, SFOR). Even though Russian forces were mainly deployed as part of the peacekeeping mission, this still signified an important change in Russian-American military relations.

Almost four years after the Elbe linkup, in March 1949, the film *The Meeting on the Elbe* premiered in Moscow. It was based on the play *Governor of the Provinces* by the Tur Brothers, which had been staged to great acclaim in Moscow and the provinces for two years.<sup>3</sup> The work does not celebrate comradely feelings. Quite the contrary: it is an unrefined account of American efforts to destroy any prospect of peace between the Soviet Union and the United States. In the film's opening scene, Soviet soldiers march proudly through the streets. One of them looks across the river, sees the Americans advancing, and says ironically: "Look, it is the last day of war—and finally we have a second front."<sup>4</sup> Instead of displaying the feelings of joy veterans on both sides claim to have experienced, the film shows playful—almost immature—Americans and disciplined Soviet soldiers, all speaking in Russian, except for the occasional "hello" and "thank you." Dark scenes from decadent American nightclubs and U.S. officer's clubs in Germany, where most of the film takes place, depict promiscuous women and coarse American soldiers dancing to jazz music.<sup>5</sup> Explicitly anti-American, the film blames the U.S. for starting the Cold War.

Both the play and the film adaptation were promoted in the Soviet Union as part of an anti-American campaign designed by Stalin and run by the Agitprop Commission of the Central Committee of the Communist Party of the Soviet Union (CPSU). This "hate America" campaign seeped into all aspects of Soviet life soon after the war, dispersing

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<sup>3</sup>The play opened in Berlin in 1947. See "Russian Play Drops Anti-American Attacks in Version for the Soviet Zone of Germany," *The New York Times*, November 12, 1947, 34. The play was translated as "Colonel Kusmin" in the article.

<sup>4</sup>*Vstrecha na El'be*, directed by Grigori Aleksandrov Edisherovich (Moscow, 1949).

<sup>5</sup>Dmitrii Shostakovich wrote the score, famously using "Yankee Doodle Dandy," the theme song of Voice of America broadcasts to the Soviet Union. See Harrison E. Salisbury, "Soviet Films Depict U.S. as Spy and as an Enemy of World Peace: Muscovites See Americans Portrayed as Mata Haris, Thieves of Russian Science and as Super-Knaves in Germany," *The New York Times*, March 18, 1949, 33.

negative images of the United States while simultaneously promoting a socialist way of life. On its anniversary in April 1949, for example, the Elbe linkup was not mentioned in the Communist Party newspaper *Pravda*. Instead, the focus was on the newly established North Atlantic Treaty Organization (NATO) and the Soviet sponsored World Peace Conference in Paris.<sup>6</sup> By the end of the decade, favorable discussions of the wartime alliance had disappeared from official Soviet discourse. But many Soviet people—including veterans of the Elbe meeting—did not forget the wartime camaraderie with their American ally.

Furthermore, in the postwar period alternative sources of information, such as foreign radio broadcasts, gave the Soviet people more tools to analyze the outside world and inside realities, contributing to an internal tension between the state and some elements of society. When, for example, Ivan Ivanovich claimed that “the American broadcasts say that our lives are bad, that workers get paid very little, and are forced to work,” he was immediately informed on and arrested. Ivan was one of many Soviet citizens who mentioned the Voice of America as an important source of information about the outside world. His rehabilitation file shows that he maligned the living standards of Soviet workers and praised the material well-being of American workers. His conclusion that “the Americans tell it as it really is” seemed based on his own experience of the Soviet Union. Ivan Ivanovich thus used both foreign sources and personal experiences at home to draw his own conclusions about Soviet shortcomings.<sup>7</sup>

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<sup>6</sup>*Pravda*, April 1949. Not even the newly premiered film, *The Meeting on the Elbe* was discussed on the four-year anniversary of the linkup.

<sup>7</sup>Gosudarstvennyi Arkhiv Rossiiskoi Federatsii, hereafter GARF, f. A-461, op. 1, d. 1307, l. 30. Ivan Ivanovich is a pseudonym.

Threatened by any criticism of the system, Soviet authorities carefully monitored attitudes toward the socialist state, which prosecuted and convicted thousands of people for anti-Soviet behavior, including many who voiced pro-American sentiments. In addition, the Communist Party of the Soviet Union created an image of America—a script, if you will—that told Soviet citizens how to perceive the United States.

But this effort to shape and control Soviet citizens' perceptions of the United States reveals more about the workings of the Soviet state than it does about the American other. The Soviet ruling elite constructed a narrative of Soviet reality, which between 1943 and 1948 was dominated by the focus on “reconstruction.”<sup>8</sup> During this period, the prevailing Soviet narrative of America focused on anti-Americanism, privileging socialist and ideological purity. After Stalin's death, especially in the years following N. S. Khrushchev's 1956 Secret Speech, in which he denounced Stalin's crimes and announced a return to Leninism, the state narrative celebrated Soviet technological achievements while emphasizing the possibility of peaceful coexistence with the West.

Although contact with foreigners was limited under Stalin, efforts to celebrate and publicize Soviet accomplishments played an important role in Soviet reactions to the United States. Looking at how the Soviet state presented itself to foreigners in general, and to Americans in particular, helps us understand how Soviet authorities used the image of the United States during the Cold War: the Soviet Union defined the socialist way of life as the antithesis of the sometimes superficially more appealing American way of life. In this respect, the actions of Soviet rulers and agitators can often be explained by a need to keep up

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<sup>8</sup>See Jeffrey W. Jones, “‘In my opinion this is all a fraud!’: Concrete, Culture, and Class in the ‘Reconstruction’ of Rostov-on-the-Don, 1943-1948” (Ph.D. diss., The University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill, 2000).

appearances. In fact, it has been argued that the entire Cold War was based on lack of communication and that posturing—crystallized in the nuclear arms race—controlled superpower relations. This is also true for cultural relations and perceptions.<sup>9</sup> Some go as far as to argue that “America shapes the way non-Americans live and think.”<sup>10</sup> With that in mind, it is especially interesting to explore perceptions of America in the Soviet context: perceptions of America played a key role in the Soviet Union in creating narratives of domestic realities and helped shape a discourse of the outside world.

Regardless of the Cold War conflict, most Soviet and American veterans of the Elbe linkup never forgot the “spirit of the Elbe” or the oath they took in April 1945 “to do everything possible to strengthen the friendship between the peoples of the USSR and USA, not to allow another war ever to occur.”<sup>11</sup> Veterans of the meeting on the Elbe remained sympathetic to each other for life, believing that someday “the spirit of brotherhood will truly prevail along the banks of the Elbe, Volga, Mississippi, and every other river on this our earth.”<sup>12</sup> The Cold War, however, made it difficult for the Elbe veterans to keep in touch; the Soviet government especially was skeptical of veterans’ efforts to hold reunions and jointly celebrate the linkup.

The first joint reunion of Soviet and American veterans of the Elbe linkup took place in Moscow in May 1955, only two years after Stalin’s death. The American Veterans of the

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<sup>9</sup>It is important to note that, despite the aggressive tone of the anti-American campaign in the Soviet Union, the Communist witch hunts in the United States provided for a similar atmosphere in America. The mutual fear of another war, atomic or traditional, was manipulated on both sides of the Atlantic and gave the Cold War its name.

<sup>10</sup>Ian Jack, “Introduction,” *GRANTA. What We Think of America* 77 (2002), 11.

<sup>11</sup>Scott, *Yanks Meet Reds*, 11.

<sup>12</sup>*Ibid.*, 10.

Elbe Linkup, an organization headed by Joseph Polowsky, had invited Soviet comrades to celebrate April 25 with them in Washington, D.C., but after accepting the offer, the Soviet side canceled at the last minute. With the cancellation, however, came an invitation to celebrate in Moscow on May 9, the official Victory Day in the Soviet Union. Nine American veterans accepted.

The Soviet side had several reasons for acting the way it did in 1955. Put bluntly, it probably did not want Soviet veterans to see the United States. Officially, however, the Soviet side expressed frustration with the American insistence on fingerprinting all entering aliens, which it called “degrading to the dignity of the Soviet people,”<sup>13</sup> and accused the American government of having raised an Iron Curtain around the U.S. Furthermore, deciding to use the Soviet Victory Day to commemorate the Elbe linkup indicated clearly where the Soviet government’s priorities lay. Finally, when the Americans had accepted the invitation, the Soviet side seized the opportunity to lavishly display Soviet hospitality. While giving the American veterans red carpet treatment, they used the occasion to tout the Soviet Union’s dedication to world peace.<sup>14</sup> Although pleased with the outcome of the meeting, the Soviet organizers suspected that three of the nine Americans were not really veterans of the Elbe linkup but had come to the Soviet Union with ulterior motives. However, the hosts managed to keep the Americans entertained and busy. Through plenty of photo ops with veterans of the Great Patriotic War, the Soviet Union played up its image as the country that

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<sup>13</sup>“Russians Bar U.S. Trip” *The New York Times*, April 18, 1956, 7. For Soviet discussions on Polowsky’s invitation, see Rossiiskii gosudarstvennyi arkhiv noveishei istorii, hereafter RGANI, op. 30, d. 161, ll. 64-71.

<sup>14</sup>“Russians Cancel a Reunion in U.S.” *The New York Times*, April 24, 1955, 53; “Ceremonies Mark Elbe Link-Up Day: Veterans Differ on Sincerity of Russian Reunion Plans—Embassy Fetes Some,” *The New York Times*, April 26, 1955, 9; “12 G.I.’s Cleared for Visit to Soviet,” *The New York Times*, April 30, 1955, 18; “U.S. Elbe Veterans Greeted in Moscow,” *The New York Times*, May 9, 1955, 2; “Solovsky Sends Eisenhower ‘Friendly Greetings’ at Elbe Fete,” *The New York Times*, May 13, 1955, 1.

suffered the most during the Second World War and the main advocate for peace after it ended.<sup>15</sup>

The American veterans' visit to Moscow can be understood only in the context of the Khrushchevian thaw. After Stalin's death, Khrushchev selectively opened the country to foreigners. Starting in 1955, Soviet and American officials slowly revived cultural relations between the countries; contacts between Soviet and American citizens became more frequent, and ordinary Soviet people could better access American culture. Still, Khrushchev was not ready to send Soviet veterans to the United States. This came only in 1958, when five Soviet veterans, led by writer and journalist Boris Polevoi, celebrated the thirteenth anniversary of the meeting on the Elbe with American veterans on the Potomac in Washington, D.C.<sup>16</sup>

This dissertation seeks to understand the various and often-conflicting images of America in the Soviet Union from the end of the Second World War in 1945 to Khrushchev's visit to America in 1959. It identifies America as the archenemy of the Soviet state as well as a land that many Soviet citizens imagined to be the opposite of the Soviet Union. This dichotomy between the state-created America and the popularly imagined America remains an important one throughout the period under investigation. Myths are often manipulated and controlled by agents, such as the state, in order to achieve a collective goal,<sup>17</sup> and here the "myth of

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<sup>15</sup>RGANI, f. 5, op. 30, d. 118, ll. 28-31.

<sup>16</sup>"U.S.-Soviet Reunion," *The New York Times*, April 10, 1958, 22; "Elbe Veterans to Meet," *The New York Times*, April 19, 1958, 2; "5 Russian Veterans Here for Elbe Fete," *The New York Times*, April 21, 1958, 44.

<sup>17</sup>See for example, Oleg Kharkhordin, *The Collective and the Individual in Russia: A Study of Practices* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1999). On the relationship between perception and memory, myth and reality see S.E. Poliakov, *Mify i real'nost' sovremennoi psikhologii* (Moscow: Editorial URSS, 2004). For the importance of myth in Soviet political culture, see A. M. Beda, *Sovetskaia politicheskaia kul'tura cherez prizmu MVD: Ot "moskovskogo patriotizma" k idee "Bol'shogo Otechestva" (1946-1958)* (Moscow:



America” embraces both the anti-American decrees of Soviet authorities on how America should be perceived and the ways state and society reacted to available American images generated by the Soviet state and American official propaganda.

In addition to maligning American life and democracy, Soviet anti-American propaganda under Stalin promoted an acceptable America, which it labeled the “second America.” The “second America” was the America of repressed people, especially workers and racial minorities, and stood against the “bad America” of Wall Street magnates and corrupt leaders. Later, under Khrushchev, peaceful coexistence replaced the “second America” discourse, although remnants of it remained powerful.

### **The Sources of the American Counter-Myth**

The Soviet state’s anti-American myth was countered with a positive counter-myth of America. This counter-myth, created by Soviet citizens and Soviet cultural officials, relied in part on the anti-American campaign, but it had four other sources: earlier images of America as a prosperous country, the positive features of the wartime alliance, American official propaganda, and growing familiarity with American culture in the aftermath of Stalin’s death.

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Izdatel'stvo ob''edineniia Mosgorarkhiv, 2002). Both Catherine Merridale and Nina Tumarkin have worked extensively with myths in the Soviet context. See Tumarkin, *The Living and the Dead: The Rise and Fall of the Cult of World War II in Russia* (New York: Basic Books, 1994) and Merridale, *Night of Stone: Death and Memory in Russia* (London: Granta Books, 2000). Following in the footsteps of Jeffrey W. Jones and Serhy Yekelchuk, who both utilize Mikhail Bakhtin’s theory on text as a dialogue as well as Fredric Jameson’s thesis that any hegemonic discourse depends on suppressed counter-discourses, I analyze the socialist construction of the myth of America and deconstruct it at the same time. Jeffrey W. Jones, “In my opinion this is all a fraud!” and Serhy Yekelchuk, “Diktat and Dialogue in Stalinist Culture: Staging Patriotic Historical Opera in Soviet Ukraine, 1936-1954,” *Slavic Review* 59, no. 3 (2000), 598. See also Bo Stråth, *Myth and Memory in the Construction of Community: Historical Patterns in Europe and Beyond* (Brussels and New York: P.I.E.-Peter Lang, 2000), 27. I have also benefited from Maria Todorova, *Imagining the Balkans* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1997), and Larry Wolff, *Inventing Eastern Europe: The Map of Civilization on the Mind of the Enlightenment* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1994).

As Jessica C. E. Gienow-Hecht has argued, politically motivated cultural programs should not be taken out of context.<sup>18</sup> Interest in America existed in Russia and the Soviet Union long before the Second World War. Both the official anti-American myth and the counter-myth grew out of decades of American images. When looking at earlier images of America, three things are worth highlighting. First, official relations between Russia and the United States can be characterized as “mutual indifference.”<sup>19</sup> After the American interference in the Russian Civil War that followed the Revolution of 1917, relations slowly increased, but America officially recognized the Soviet Union only in 1933. Second, strong anti-American themes had dominated Russian literature and travelogues in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries. Russian writers and journalists wrote poems, short stories, plays and travelogues about America that gradually reached an increasingly literate Russian reading public.<sup>20</sup> Their works generally have in common a focus on perceived American greatness,

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<sup>18</sup>Jessica C. E. Gienow-Hecht, “‘How Good Are We?’ Culture and the Cold War” in Giles Scott-Smith and Hans Krabbendam, eds., *The Cultural Cold War in Western Europe, 1945-1960* (London: Frank Cass, 2003), 279. Gienow-Hecht makes her argument for German-American cultural relations but the broader idea of continuity can be applied to Russian/Soviet-American relations as well.

<sup>19</sup>Nikolai N. Bolkhovitinov, *Russia and the American Revolution*, trans. and ed. C. Jay Smith (Tallahassee, FL: Diplomatic Press, 1976).

<sup>20</sup>Many of these works remain important reference points about the United States of America in addition to being part of the Russian literary canon. Such beloved authors as Vladimir Korolenko, Maxim Gorky, Aleksandr Blok, Osip Mandelstam, Vladimir Mayakovsky, and Ilya Ilf and Eugene Petrov contributed greatly to the creation of the myth of America in the Soviet Union. For a discussion about Korolenko and perceptions of America, see Olga Peters Hasty and Susanne Fusso, *America Through Russian Eyes, 1874-1926* (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 1988), 83-85. See also Vladimir Korolenko, *In a Strange Land* (New York: Bernard G. Richards Co. Inc., 1925); Charles A. Moser, “Korolenko and America,” *Russian Review* 28, no. 3 (1969): 303-14; Jane E. Good, “‘I’d Rather Live in Siberia’: V. G. Korolenko’s Critique of America, 1893,” *The Historian* 44, no. 2 (1982): 190-206. Charles Rougle, *Three Russians Consider America: America in the Works of Maksim Gorkij, Aleksandr Blok, and Vladimir Majakovskij* (Stockholm: Almqvist & Wiksell International, 1976); Filia Holzmann, “A Mission That Failed: Gor’kij in America,” *Slavic and East European Journal* 6, no. 3 (1962): 227-35; Ernest Poole, “Maxim Gorki in New York,” *Slavonic and East European Review, American Series* 3, no. 1 (1944): 77-83; Mark Twain, “The Gorki Incident: An Unpublished Fragment (1906),” *Slavonic and East European Review, American Series* 3, no. 2 (1944): 37-38. On Mayakovsky see Charles A. Moser, “Mayakovsky and America,” *Russian Review*, 25, no. 3 (1966): 242-56; Charles A. Moser,

which upon closer inspection does not meet expectations. A typical Russian travelogue described a vibrant and lively country, but emphasized social and racial injustices.<sup>21</sup> Third, in the 1920s and 1930s, American industrial technology was openly praised in the Soviet Union, and terms such as Fordism and Taylorism became synonymous with progress and efficiency.<sup>22</sup> America was to be admired for its industrial progress but ridiculed for its socioeconomic and racial problems. The Red press emphasized the “moral bankruptcy in the American social welfare system” while acknowledging the growing international role of the United States in the post-World War I period, along with American technology and efficiency.<sup>23</sup>

During World War II, more information about how people lived in the West, increased personal contacts with Americans, and the presence of American Lend-Lease products left an indelible mark on many Soviet citizens. Despite the deterioration of Soviet-American relations afterward, the Second World War both contributed to the myth of America and confirmed the harshness of Soviet domestic life in ways that no fiction could have done. The war’s aftermath would have a lasting effect on the way both Soviet citizens and Soviet authorities perceived the United States. The war made it possible for many people to see the West, for others to receive information about the West, and for rumors and hearsay about the

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“Mayakovsky’s Unsentimental Journeys,” *American Slavic and East European Review* 19, no. 1 (1960): 85-100.

<sup>21</sup>For example Vladimir Korolenko, *Puteshestvie v Ameriku* (Moscow: Zadruga, 1923) and Il’ia Il’f and Evgenii Petrov, *Odnoetazhnaia Amerika* (Moscow: Khudozh. lit-ra, 1937).

<sup>22</sup>Alan M. Ball, *Imagining America: Influence and Images in Twentieth-Century Russia* (Lanham, MD: Rowman & Littlefield, 2003), xx.

<sup>23</sup>Kevin J. McKenna, *All the Views Fit to Print: Changing Images of the U.S. in Pravda Political Cartoons, 1917-1991* (New York: Peter Lang Publishing, Inc., 2001), 33-39. Quote p. 39.

West to travel much faster than before. Precisely because of the war's traumatic effects on the Soviet people, these new sources of information transformed the betrayed hopes that some people felt toward Soviet power into the creation of an American utopia: a Promised Land where people lived in excess and used white bread for fishing bait.<sup>24</sup>

In the postwar period, American official propaganda also contributed to the counter-myth of America. Not many American sources of information reached the Soviet people under Stalin, but the U.S. State Department published a glossy magazine, *Amerika Illustrated*, from 1944 to 1952, and sponsored Voice of America radio broadcasts from 1947. Under Khrushchev, the publication of *Amerika Illustrated* resumed in 1956 and cultural contacts steadily increased, culminating with the American National Exhibition in Sokolniki in 1959. As we shall see, despite Soviet efforts to limit and counter American propaganda in the Soviet Union, it, too, contributed to the counter-myth of America in the period under investigation.

Who was responsible for the “myth of America” in the Soviet Union? The ruling elite, members of the Central Committee, and the Central Committee's Agitprop Commission designed the anti-American myth. The Ministry of Internal Affairs and the secret police maintained social control by detaining, arresting, and sometimes prosecuting and sentencing those responsible for expressing positive views of America in the form of a counter-myth. Thus Soviet anti-Americanism was orchestrated from above, and surely many Soviet citizens accepted the official image of the United States. This dissertation, however, identifies discontent and doubtfulness about the honesty of the anti-American myth among both Soviet

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<sup>24</sup>V. A. Kozlov and S. V. Mironenko, *58.10: nadzornye proizvodstva prokuratury SSSR po delam ob antisovetskoi agitatsii i propagande. Annotirovannyi katalog, mart, 1953-1991* (Moscow: Mezhdunarodnyi fond “Demokratiia,” 1999), 297.

citizens and Soviet officials. Chapter 2, especially, highlights how some Soviet citizens deliberately spoke against the official anti-American myth, but all the chapters emphasize how Soviet citizens and officials gradually realized that, in order for the Soviet Union to live up to its own image as the ideal socialist state, it could learn from America in many aspects.

### **Historiography and Themes**

The end of the Cold War improved access to formerly sealed Soviet archival sources at the same time that cultural studies theories influenced some historians working on the Cold War who focus on the role of culture in state relations. Culture is defined here as “the sharing and transmission of memory, ideology, emotions, life-styles, scholarly and artistic works, and other symbols.”<sup>25</sup> Much of the lively literature on Cold War culture has become intertwined with that on globalization, especially as the focus has shifted to the spreading of and reaction to American culture. Increasingly, cultural globalization debates have focused on the concept of Americanization. Indeed, an American culture of leisure, entertainment, consumerism, and convenience spread quickly throughout the western world, where it was simultaneously detested, embraced, and localized. To some, the only remaining superpower in 1991 was, in hindsight, fit to define the twentieth century, which has been dubbed the “American Century.”<sup>26</sup>

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<sup>25</sup>Akira Iriye, “Culture,” *Journal of American History* 77, no. 1 (1990): 100. See also his “Culture and Power: International Relations and Intercultural Relations,” *Diplomatic History* 3, no. 2 (1979): 115-28.

<sup>26</sup>In 1941, Henry Luce famously predicted that the twentieth century would become an American century. Since then, this label has been applied several times and was most recently discussed by historians of American foreign relations in *Diplomatic History* roundtable discussions in 1999 (issues 2 and 3). For the original concept see Henry Luce, “The American Century” *Diplomatic History* 23, no. 2 (1999): 159-71. Originally published in *Life Magazine*, February 7, 1941.

To date, the new research has mainly focused on the influence of American culture on European countries for several reasons. For one, historians choose their topics based on their language skills: in addition to his or her native language, European scholars often have excellent command of English and can thus easily study topics such as the “Coca-Colonization” of their own Heimat.<sup>27</sup> Second, the American economic contribution in the form of the Marshall Aid to the reconstruction of Europe in the postwar period made both American consumer products as well as access to American institutions of higher education available to Europeans through economic agreements and exchange programs. Hollywood was an eager ally of the American information campaign of the early Cold War and both contributed greatly to the economic might of the United States and helped spread cultural images of America around the world.

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<sup>27</sup>Not only European but some American historians have studied the effects of “Americanization” in Europe. See for example Richard H. Pells, *Not Like Us: How Europeans Have Loved, Hated, and Transformed American Culture Since World War II* (New York: BasicBooks, 1997); David W. Ellwood, Rob Kroes, and Gian Piero Brunetta, *Hollywood in Europe: Experiences of a Cultural Hegemony* (Amsterdam: VU University Press, 1994); Jessica C. E. Gienow-Hecht, *Transmission Impossible: American Journalism as Cultural Diplomacy in Postwar Germany, 1945-1955* (Baton Rouge: Louisiana State University Press, 1999); Jessica C. E. Gienow-Hecht and Frank Schumacher, *Culture and International History* (New York: Berghahn Books, 2003); Rob Kroes, *If You've Seen One, You've Seen the Mall: Europeans and American Mass Culture* (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 1996); Rob Kroes et al., *Anti-Americanism in Europe* (Amsterdam: Free University Press, 1986); Alexander Stephan, *Americanization and Anti-Americanism: The German Encounter With American Culture after 1945* (New York: Berghahn Books, 2005); Alexander Stephan, *The Americanization of Europe: Culture, Diplomacy, and Anti-Americanism After 1945* (New York: Berghahn Books, 2006); Reinhold Wagnleitner, *Coca-Colonisation und Kalter Krieg: die Kulturmission der USA in Österreich nach dem Zweiten Weltkrieg* (Vienna: Verlag für Gesellschaftskritik, 1991); Reinhold Wagnleitner and Elaine Tyler May, *Here, There, and Everywhere: The Foreign Politics of American Popular Culture* (Hanover, NH: University Press of New England, 2000); Richard F. Kuisel, *Seducing the French: The Dilemma of Americanization* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1993). A few scholars have attempted to explain the creation and role of the Soviet other in America during the early Cold War period. See for example Emily S. Rosenberg, *Spreading the American Dream: American Economic and Cultural Expansion, 1890-1945* (New York: Hill and Wang, 1982); Richard M. Fried, *The Russians Are Coming! The Russians Are Coming! Pageantry and Patriotism in Cold-War America* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1998); Walter L. Hixson, *Parting the Curtain: Propaganda, Culture, and the Cold War, 1945-1961* (New York: St. Martin's Press, 1997); Stephen J. Whitfield, *The Culture of the Cold War*, 2nd ed. (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1996); and Frank A. Ninkovich, *The Diplomacy of Ideas: U.S. Foreign Policy and Cultural Relations, 1938-1950* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1981). What these studies have in common is that they divert attention to the role of ideology and political culture, and ultimately, to the power of personal interactions and citizen diplomacy in general.

Remarkably missing from studies of Cold War culture is the role of a key player: the Soviet Union, whose cultural offensive during the Cold War has received but scant attention. While several works have focused on the influences of American propaganda on the Soviet Union and Eastern Europe,<sup>28</sup> they draw almost exclusively on American archival and published sources. Reliance on American sources, however, has tended to reproduce estimates on success made by the American State Department and its institutions, such as the United States Information Agency.

The Soviet part in the cultural Cold War has mostly been ignored, both the propaganda campaign that the Soviet state and Communist Party led in the United States as well as Soviet reactions to American propaganda in the Soviet Union. A few scholars have ventured into Soviet archives,<sup>29</sup> but they have clearly not plowed the whole field of Soviet cultural relations with foreign countries during the Cold War. The only recent work on the Soviet role in the cultural Cold War, David Caute's *The Dancer Defects: The Struggle for Cultural Supremacy During the Cold War*, covers "the propaganda wars" between the Soviet Union and the United States, especially in the arts.<sup>30</sup> In an enormously informative book, Caute argues that "the moral, ideological, and cultural defeat of the Soviet system was set in motion

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<sup>28</sup>Amanda Wood Aucoin, "Deconstructing the American Way of Life: Soviet Responses to Cultural Exchange," (Ph.D. diss., University of Arkansas, 2001); David Caute, *The Dancer Defects: The Struggle for Cultural Supremacy During the Cold War* (Oxford and NY: Oxford University Press, 2003); Hixson, *Parting the Curtain*, Robert Francis Byrnes, *Soviet-American Academic Exchanges, 1958-1975* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1976); Yale Richmond, *Cultural Exchange and the Cold War: Raising the Iron Curtain* (University Park, PA: The Pennsylvania State University Press, 2003); Yale Richmond, *U.S.-Soviet Cultural Exchanges, 1958-1986: Who Wins?* (Boulder: Westview Press, 1987); Yale Richmond, *Soviet-American Cultural Exchanges: Ripoff or Payoff?* (Washington, DC: Kennan Institute for Advanced Russian Studies, 1984).

<sup>29</sup>Most notably Amanda Wood Aucoin, David Caute, and Walter Hixson.

<sup>30</sup>He focuses on display arts (including architecture and the staging of national achievement exhibitons), the performing arts (theatre, cinema, ballet), music (classical, jazz, and popular), and the fine arts (painting, sculpture, poster art).

as soon as the cold war began, post-1945.”<sup>31</sup> While I agree with this argument, I maintain that a closer look behind the Iron Curtain is in order to understand why the Soviet offensive remained relatively unsuccessful. Caute’s conclusion that Soviet authorities were “losing the wider *Kulturkampf* from the outset because they were afraid of freedom and were seen to be afraid”<sup>32</sup> needs clarification; the propaganda goals of the Soviet authorities need to be put into perspective by showing an appreciation for domestic circumstances.

In spite of much financial backing, Soviet strategies for selling socialism abroad failed. After the Second World War and the hardening of American propaganda, the Soviet side was very much on the defensive. This was partly because it focused on domestic priorities and partly because much of the Western world turned anti-Soviet in the postwar years and presenting Soviet propaganda to foreigners was an uphill battle. Before the war, the Soviet side had the backing of foreigners associated with Soviet front-organizations, but gradually the Kremlin realized that these circles were not to be relied on for spreading information about the Soviet project. The Soviet Union hardly ever missed a beat in its mission of “telling the truth” about socialism, at home and abroad. In the immediate postwar years, however, this mission had to adapt to an increasingly aggressive and appealing American propaganda, while making sure that the Soviet people would remain loyal to the Soviet cause.

What a few other works on Soviet cultural diplomacy and its uses during the Cold War have in common is that American participants in the ideological Cold War between the Soviet Union and the United States wrote them. Perhaps the most prolific author on Soviet

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<sup>31</sup>Caute, *The Dancer Defects*, 2.

<sup>32</sup>Ibid.



cultural diplomacy at the time, Frederick C. Barghoorn, was a cultural attaché at the American Embassy in Moscow in 1942-47<sup>33</sup> and later professor of political science at Yale University. Openly anti-Soviet, Barghoorn's works are full of interesting detail and valuable information, but his own political views influence his focus and bias his conclusions. Yale Richmond, also a former diplomat who worked for many years on U.S.-Soviet cultural exchanges, both in the State Department and at the American Embassy in Moscow, similarly draws on his own experiences to argue that the United States won the cultural Cold War. In his latest book, Richmond uses interviews with both Soviet and Russian participants in the exchanges to further this argument. Although he has greatly contributed to our knowledge about the cultural Cold War, one needs to remember that his is a narrative authored by a victor.

Two valuable works on Soviet-American cultural relations for the period under discussion deserve special mention. The first one is J. D. Parks's *Culture, Conflict, and Coexistence: American-Soviet Cultural Relations, 1917-1958*. Published in 1983 and completely based on English-language and American State Department sources, the study nevertheless is insightful in its compact overview of the cultural contacts, their development, and change over time. The second work is Walter L. Hixson's *Parting the Curtain: Propaganda, Culture, and the Cold War, 1945-1961*, which in recent years is probably the most cited work on the Soviet-American cultural Cold War. Hixson's "primary focus is on propaganda and culture as components of national security policy."<sup>34</sup> Seeing American mass culture as "one

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<sup>33</sup>Frederick C. Barghoorn, "The Image of Russia in Soviet Propaganda," in *Soviet Imperialism: Its Origins and Tactics* (Notre Dame, IN: University of Notre Dame Press, 1953), 137-65; Barghoorn, *Soviet Image of America*, xiii.

<sup>34</sup>Hixson, *Parting the Curtain*, ix.

of the country's greatest foreign policy assets,"<sup>35</sup> he analyzes—almost exclusively—American perceptions of their own successes and failures in infiltrating the Soviet Bloc with Western culture and values.

This dissertation thus fills a gap in the historiography on the cultural Cold War between the United States and the Soviet Union by taking into account Soviet reactions to the United States as well as the Soviet cultural offensive. I look at the cultural Cold War as a struggle in which ideology, values, norms, and cultural artifacts played the main role. I pay due attention to Soviet perceptions of American values and what they tell us about Soviet domestic realities. Norms play a role here as they predict how the Soviet state expected the Soviet people to behave: the Soviet state's methods included broadly defining counterrevolutionary or anti-Soviet behavior as a deviation from expected behavior of Soviet citizens. Finally, cultural artifacts constitute the plays, books, perfume bottles, and the varied information about American life that people consumed in the broadest sense of the word.

### **Soviet Consciousness and Soviet Sources**

One often encounters in Western scholarly literature appraisals of Soviet citizens' abilities to judge the outside world, where they saw alternatives to the life they led within the Union of Soviet Socialist Republics. This trend in the historiography on the Soviet Union started in the 1950s with the Harvard Refugee Project and was later reinforced by émigré testimonies, which at the time were the only available accounts of everyday life in the Soviet Union because access to the country, the people, and the archives remained restricted. Later, with the onset of perestroika and glasnost, memoirs were published in the Soviet Union that

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<sup>35</sup>Ibid., xi.

discussed the utopian vision many Soviet citizens had of the West in general and of America in particular.<sup>36</sup> With the fall of the Soviet Union, historians have made critical use of recently unclassified reports on the mood of Soviet citizens (*svodki*), as well as of letters and private diaries. These sources reveal the limits of indoctrination and the extent to which people harbored alternative understandings of Soviet domestic history and the outside world.<sup>37</sup> My work contributes to the latest trend in that it draws on the archival record, but it pushes the discussion in a new direction. For one, most previous research focuses on the 1930s, while my work focuses on the postwar years, from the end of the Second World War to 1959. This period saw the onset of an anti-American campaign in the Soviet Union, the death of Stalin, the beginning of the Khrushchevian thaw, the invasion of Hungary, the Moscow Youth Festival, and the American National Exhibition—all milestone events that influenced Soviet citizens' outlook on domestic and international affairs.

I base this dissertation on Russian archival sources, memoirs, travelogues, and the Soviet press. Dictating the shape the dissertation takes, archival sources from state and local Moscow archives inform the body of the dissertation. There is no easy way to locate

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<sup>36</sup>Liudmila Alexeyeva's *The Thaw Generation: Coming of Age in the Post-Stalin Era* (Boston: Little Brown, 1990) is probably the most widely known memoir in the West. Vassily Aksyonov's *In Search of Melancholy Baby*, trans. Michael Henry Heim & Antonia W. Bouis (New York: Random House, 1987) is also popular. For a recent example, see Vladimir Voinovich's *Antisovetskii Sovetskii Soiuz: Dokumental'naia fantastagoriia v 4-kh chastiakh* (Moscow: Izdatel'stvo "Materik", 2002), first published in the US as *The Anti-Soviet Soviet Union*, trans. Richard Lourie (San Diego: Harcourt Brace Jovanovich, 1986). See also Dmitrii Bobyshev's *Ia zdes' (Chelovekotekst)* (Moscow: Vagrius, 2003), which has a chapter on "American things" (*Amerikanskie veshchi*).

<sup>37</sup>Sarah Davies, *Popular Opinion in Stalin's Russia: Terror, Propaganda, and Dissent, 1934-1941* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1997) relies on *svodki* and Sheila Fitzpatrick, *Everyday Stalinism: Ordinary Life in Extraordinary Times: Soviet Russia in the 1930s* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1999) relies on letters and, to a lesser extent, *svodki*. Jochen Hellbeck has published several influential articles where he uses Soviet diaries of the 1930s, but he focuses on representations of the self within the Soviet state and not on how his subjects saw the outside world. See, for example, his "Fashioning the Stalinist Soul: The Diary of Stepan Podlubnyi (1931-1939)," *Jahrbücher für Geschichte Osteuropas* 44, no. 3 (1996): 344-73. Davies and Fitzpatrick also focus mainly on inside realities but mention the outside world in passing.

perceptions of America in Russian archives. I had to examine an enormous number of finding aids in order to decide what documents to order. Since my original interest was in cultural relations as a dimension of foreign policy,<sup>38</sup> I was inclined to look at sources that dealt with propaganda and cultural relations. Sources from institutional archives reveal a great deal of information about the nature of Soviet cultural policy, both domestically and in relation to foreign countries. The archives of cultural and political organizations bear witness to practices of internal social control, while simultaneously showing increased adaptability and willingness to coexist with the West. Most of all, however, they are a testament to the willingness of Soviet cultural officials to improve their strategies, but they also show the lack of means to execute improvement plans. I deliberately avoided sources that shed light on issues such as science and sports, as well as highly politicized issues such as the development and use of atomic energy.<sup>39</sup>

I also explore a valuable but little-used source base about people convicted for anti-Soviet behavior to show that the popular imagination of some Soviet citizens cast the United States of America in a positive light.<sup>40</sup> These revealing sources give a clear picture of the state's attempts to control the myths about the Soviet Union and the outside world and how it went after those who challenged those myths. Furthermore, one can often trace the anti-Soviet

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<sup>38</sup>Ninkovich, *The Diplomacy of Ideas*, 1-8; Philip Hall Coombs, *The Fourth Dimension of Foreign Policy: Educational and Cultural Affairs* (New York: Published for the Council on Foreign Relations by Harper & Row, 1964).

<sup>39</sup>These other topics are well worthy of study and can often illuminate Soviet-American relations. A good example is Nikolai Kremmentsov's *The Cure: A Story of Cancer and Politics from the Annals of the Cold War* (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 2002), which tells the story of the Soviet search for a cure for cancer and Stalin's wish for Soviet science to "catch up with and overtake" Western science (84).

<sup>40</sup>These sources can be found in GARF, in the USSR Procuracy fond (f. R-8131) and the RSFSR Procuracy fond (f. A-461).

(here pro-American) comments to either the official anti-American discourse of the Soviet authorities or to alternative sources of information, such as contact with American soldiers on the front during World War II or radio broadcasts.

These documents combine several of the elements found in reports on the popular mood and in personal letters, but they also include biographical information about real people and therefore allow some analysis of who these people were and where they got their ideas from. These sources are of extreme value in recapturing the kinds of views that ordinary people held of America and the origins of these images. Moreover, the sources indicate how the state tried to control, monitor, and shape its citizens. They also show that some people used the rhetorical tools provided by the regime, such as anti-American newspaper articles, to voice their criticisms of the Soviet Union. They turned the language of anti-American slogans inside out and, instead of maligning the United States, they cursed the Soviet Union and Soviet socialism. Finally, these sources reveal that some people remembered the earlier times when American industrial technology was praised, while others sometimes used alternative sources of information about the West, such as foreign radio broadcasts or actual meetings with foreigners during World War II, to form their opinions about the outside world and domestic realities.

In former Communist Party archives, the Russian State Archive of Socio-Political History (RGASPI) and the Russian State Archive of Contemporary History (RGANI), I looked mainly at documents on agitation and propaganda, as well as the general archives of the Central Committee of the Soviet Communist Party. Some personal collections, such as that of V. M. Molotov, were also helpful in considering reactions to official American propaganda in the 1940s. In the State Archive of the Russian Federation (GARF), I focused

on cultural organizations and tourism agencies, the Council of Ministers, and the Soviet Procuracy. Given my emphasis on culture and propaganda, I also looked at the archives of the influential Soviet Writers' Union in the Russian State Archive of Literature and Art (RGALI), as well as some personal collections. In other archives, such as the State Archive of Social Movements of Moscow (TsAODM) and the archive of Memorial', a Russian NGO dedicated to collecting information about political persecution in the Soviet Union, I obtained relevant information as well. It is impossible to claim to have exhausted the main Russian archives, but I strongly believe that my findings are representative and help us in understanding Soviet perceptions of the United States of America.

Like all sources, Soviet administrative sources need to be treated with caution. This is especially true given my interest in perceptions and realities. Recently, historiography on the Soviet experience has mostly focused on resistance and compliance under Stalin and the extent of de-Stalinization under Khrushchev. Debates surrounding both these issues have much to do with source criticism and the nature of Soviet administrative sources, boiling down to questions such as “How Do We Know What the People Thought Under Stalin?”<sup>41</sup> I propose, considering the context of Soviet socialism, that while reading these sources, one may speak of socialist constructs, which take into account the ideological assumption of the Soviet state. It is telling that Soviet authorities created an anti-American campaign and simultaneously prosecuted people who voiced pro-American views. In reacting so strongly to America and everything it stood for, Soviet authorities helped make the United States an

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<sup>41</sup>Hiroaki Kuromiya, “How Do We Know What the People Thought Under Stalin?” in *Sovetskaia vlast'—narodnaia vlast'?: Ocherki istorii narodnogo vospriiatiia Sovetskoi vlasti v SSSR*, ed. Timo Vihavainen (Sankt-Peterburg: Evropeiski Dom, 2003): 30-49.

attractive place and were thus, in part, to blame for the interest Soviet citizens showed in the United States.

The dissertation is organized both chronologically and thematically and takes us from the meeting on the Elbe in 1945 to Khrushchev's watershed visit to the United States in 1959. Chapter 1 introduces the state-sponsored anti-American campaign during the Stalin years and some of its most active participants. Chapter 2 addresses the effectiveness of the anti-American campaign as it uncovers an unofficial counter-myth that mirrored the anti-American propaganda promoted by Soviet (and sometimes American) authorities. The public transcript of the myth of America both reacted to the Stalin-promoted myth of America and relied on alternative sources of information in the late 1940s throughout 1956, the year of Khrushchev's Secret Speech. Chapter 3 considers official American propaganda during the Stalin era and shows that it contributed to the popular counter-myth that greatly distressed Soviet authorities. The chapter also considers the Soviet state's efforts in presenting itself to foreigners. Soviet authorities hoped that they could increase American interest in the Soviet Union, but Stalin's xenophobic isolationism made it very difficult for Soviet cultural officials to propagandize to Americans. Chapter 4 examines the restored cultural relations with the United States, with a focus on the "revival of Soviet-American cultural exchanges" in 1955. Finally, Chapter 5 looks at Khrushchev's efforts to celebrate Soviet socialism while trying to maintain social order and promote the concept of peaceful coexistence with the United States. I conclude by considering Soviet perceptions of the United States in the 1960s and beyond, speculating on the meaning and importance of the myth of America in the Soviet Union and, after 1991, in Russia.

## Chapter 1

### **Stalin's Script for Anti-Americanism: Patriotism and Propaganda, 1945-51**

In 1947, twenty-one-year-old Liuba, a worker in the “Red Seamstress” factory and a member of the Communist Youth Organization, the Komsomol, was arrested in Moscow. Four years earlier, during intermission at the Bolshoi Theater, Liuba had been approached by John, a young American working at the U.S. Embassy in Moscow. Their acquaintance developed into a fleeting love affair. But, in 1945, John returned to the United States for good, and, after sporadic letter exchanges, their relationship soon came to an end. For Liuba, however, the real drama was yet to start. She was one of the first victims of the anti-American campaign launched in the Soviet Union in 1946-47. In 1948, she was sentenced to three years in prison for her relations with the American and branded a socially harmful element.<sup>1</sup>

Imprisoning people for anti-Soviet or counterrevolutionary behavior was not new in the Soviet Union. In the postwar period, however, the Soviet state first started persecuting people who made positive references to the United States or, as in the case of Liuba, had personal contacts with Americans during the war. As political relations between the Soviet Union and the United States worsened, ordinary citizens were well advised not to express

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<sup>1</sup>Gosudarstvennyi Arkhiv Rossiiskoi Federatsii, hereafter GARF, f. 8131, op. 31, d. 16172. Both Liuba and John are pseudonyms.



positive sentiments about the former ally, which in postwar Soviet discourse was reduced to a capitalist imperialist enemy.

Looking at the high point of the anti-American campaign in 1947-51, this chapter has two goals. First, it seeks to clarify the nature of the anti-American campaign and situate it within the larger antic cosmopolitan campaign that dominated the Soviet Union in the last years under Stalin's rule. Antic cosmopolitanism was a nationalistic ideological doctrine that entailed an attack on "antipatriotism" in general, but, more specifically, it was aimed at anything non-Russians.<sup>2</sup> Antic cosmopolitanism soon turned into a persecution of Jews in the Soviet Union, but this anti-Western campaign also led to widespread paranoia as people and groups accused of spying or of harboring pro-Western sympathies were severely punished.<sup>3</sup> Second, the official anti-American campaign provides the background necessary to understand why Soviet citizens, like Liuba, were prosecuted and imprisoned for their contacts with Americans. This chapter lays out the state-created myth of America, while chapter 2 discusses the counter-myth that existed at the same time in the Soviet Union.

Official Soviet agitators took on the role of frontline soldiers in the anti-American campaign of the late 1940s: the Central Committee's Department for Agitation and Propaganda (Agitprop) bore responsibility for carrying out the anti-Western campaign.<sup>4</sup>

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<sup>2</sup>Konstantin Azadovskii and Boris Egorov, "From Anti-Westernism to Anti-Semitism: Stalin and the Impact of the 'Anti-Cosmopolitan' Campaigns on Soviet Culture," *Journal of Cold War Studies* 4, no. 1 (2002): 67.

<sup>3</sup>Yoram Gorlizki and O. V. Khlevniuk, *Cold Peace: Stalin and the Soviet Ruling Circle, 1945-1953* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2004), 70.

<sup>4</sup>An investigation of the documents of the Agitprop Department of the Central Committee of the CPSU (found in Rossiiskii gosudarstvennyi arkhiv sotsial'no-politicheskoi istorii, hereafter RGASPI, f. 17, op. 125 and 132) reveals the strategy and planning behind the anti-American propaganda in the immediate postwar years. See also Vladimir Pechatnov, "Exercise in Frustration: Soviet Foreign Propaganda in the Early Cold War, 1945-47," *Cold War History* 1, no. 2 (2001): 1-27; and N.I. Nikolaeva, "Obraz SShA v Sovetskom obshchestve v poslevoennye gody, 1945-1953," *Amerikanskii ezhegodnik* (Moscow: Izd-vo Nauka, 2002): 244-70.

Agitprop's full-fledged anti-American campaign seeped into all aspects of daily life, but it was especially prevalent in the arts. I privilege the written word: a diverse group of Russian and Soviet writers, playwrights, poets, and journalists contributed to images of America. Moreover, Stalin promoted literature as "the crown jewel of Soviet culture," and the Communist Party advocated for and celebrated the high literacy of the Soviet people.<sup>5</sup> The Communist Party controlled the production and publication of literary works, not only deciding which of the classic anti-American works were to be republished and in what form, but also ordered Soviet writers and playwrights to incorporate anti-American themes into their writings.<sup>6</sup> The chapter now turns to investigate the role of the Communist Party in creating the anti-American campaign in the context of Soviet domestic realities during the early Cold War. In order to understand why a fleeting love affair between a Soviet woman and an American man during the war ended with imprisonment for her in 1947, one needs to understand the political realities of the late Stalin years in the Soviet Union.

### **After the War: Soviet Reality and the Anticosmopolitan Campaign**

The Second World War, or the Great Patriotic War, as it became known in the Soviet Union, was a time of incredible hardships for the Soviet people. It is estimated that about

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<sup>5</sup>See Nancy Condee, "Cultural Codes of the Thaw," in *Nikita Khrushchev*, ed. William Taubman, Sergei Khrushchev, and Abbott Gleason (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2000): 160-76.

<sup>6</sup>For information on the politics of literature in the Soviet Union see Harold Swayze, *Political Control of Literature in the USSR, 1946-1959* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1962). Swayze does not deal directly with American topics but his study provides a very useful background for understanding the control the Soviet Communist Party exerted over literature. For information about America and Americans in Soviet literature, see Vera Alexandrova, "America and Americans in Soviet Literature" *Russian Review* 2, no. 2 (1943): 19-26. See also Valentin Kiparsky, *English and American Characters in Russian Fiction* (Berlin: In Kommission bei O. Harrassowitz Wiesbaden, 1964); and Charles Rougle, *Three Russians Consider America: America in the Works of Maksim Gorkij, Aleksandr Blok, and Vladimir Majakovskij* (Stockholm: Almqvist & Wiksell International, 1976).

twenty-seven million Soviet citizens lost their lives during the war, creating a demographic crisis. On the geopolitical level, victory seemed to make the war sacrifices worthwhile: the Soviet Union had established itself on a global level and the socialist state, now one of two superpowers, had to be taken into account when debating a postwar international settlement.

Domestically, however, the war-weary Soviet population remained mobilized in order to rebuild the country. Food rationing ended only in December 1947, and, to make a bad situation worse, grain production had experienced a dramatic decrease in 1946,<sup>7</sup> causing a famine in the southern parts of Russia, in Ukraine, and in Moldova.<sup>8</sup> Famine and rationing dashed hopes for a better life immediately after the war. Therefore, the superpower struggle distracted the Soviet people, who wanted nothing more than peace and a return to normality. As an example of popular frustrations at this time, the Leningrad Oblast Communist Party organization reported to the Central Committee that there seemed to be “profound confusion and uncertainty”<sup>9</sup> among the city’s population about the long-term prospects for durable peace and security. In October 1947, the Leningrad Oblast Committee sent information reports (*svodki*) to Moscow containing its observations of the mood of Leningrad oblast workers. Leningrad workers worried whether a war between the United States and the Soviet Union was likely. They also posed challenging questions about the nature of the peace and the role that America would play on the postwar stage. “How much of a threat to world peace was the United States?” “Was America ready to go to war again?” “Would America

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<sup>7</sup>Elena Zubkova, *Russia After the War: Hopes, Illusions, and Disappointments, 1945-1957*, trans. and ed. by Hugh Ragsdale (Armonk, NY and London, England: M.E. Sharpe, 1998), 40.

<sup>8</sup>*Ibid.*, 40-42.

<sup>9</sup>RGASPI, f. 17, op. 125, d. 510, l. 17.

use the atomic bomb again?” “In the case of an attack from the former allies, was Soviet strength sufficient?” Tired of war, people asked about who benefited from the superpower struggle: “Why is the Soviet Union competing with the United States and England? Would it not be better if our leadership surrendered to these countries?”<sup>10</sup>

Party organizations from all over the country sent in similar reports, suggesting that these kinds of questions lay heavily on the minds of the Soviet people.<sup>11</sup> As soon as the Cold War had started, Stalin’s theory of the inevitability of wars between the capitalist powers took on a somewhat changed form in the Soviet Union.<sup>12</sup> Now, the government promoted rumors about the possibility of a new war, this time against the United States. This fed a real fear among the population, which may also have had an unintended side effect. While many people took the rumor of war to heart, some questioned the integrity of this speculation and suggested that such a war would be senseless. Still, rumors of a renewed war probably helped garner support for the Soviet regime and convinced people to sacrifice further so that the Soviet Union could potentially fight a war with the former allies.

The effect of the war on the mentality of the Soviet people has not been studied in detail, but in a pathbreaking monograph on the postwar period, Russian historian Elena Zubkova has argued that the war did not change the relationship between the people and the regime. She maintains that supporters of the system backed it even more strongly after the war, while

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<sup>10</sup>Ibid. The sources usually use Angliia, or England, rather than the United Kingdom. Sometimes, it is clear that the reference is to the whole United Kingdom but in the dissertation I follow the Russian sources in talking mainly about England and not the United Kingdom.

<sup>11</sup>Andrea Graziosi and Oleg Khlevniuk, eds., *Sovetskaia zhizn’, 1945-1953* (Moscow: Rosspen, 2003), passim.

<sup>12</sup>See for example David J. Dallin, *The Real Soviet Russia*, trans. Joseph Shaplen (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1947), 101.

nonbelievers remained unconverted. Furthermore, the social psychology of the conflict proved to be dangerous to the government: “The war awoke in people the capacity to think in unaccustomed ways, to evaluate a situation critically, and never again to accept uncritically any exclusive version of the truth.”<sup>13</sup> Zubkova especially attributes the change in disposition of the Soviet people to the final months of the war:

A process of psychological reorientation was catalyzed by the last stage of the war when the Soviet soldier crossed the frontier and encountered another society, politically, culturally, and economically. As a result soldiers returned from the war in possession of a comparative experience and knowledge of considerable significance.<sup>14</sup>

To be sure, the Second World War had increased American influence in the Soviet Union. American aid in the form of Lend-Lease brought American tanks, jeeps, trucks, motorcycles, explosives, guns, and foodstuffs to the Soviet Union. Even though it has been argued that Lend-Lease failed to give Americans leverage in negotiations after the war,<sup>15</sup> the lasting image of Lend-Lease proved a plus for the American cultural offensive launched as the Cold War unfolded, and later, too. People remained grateful for Lend-Lease products. In 2002, a Russian historian recollected how a family member held on to an empty carton of American cigarettes acquired during World War II. The cigarettes long smoked, the carton remained on display in his living room, a symbol of another world, off limits and unattainable but nevertheless appealing.<sup>16</sup>

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<sup>13</sup>Zubkova, *Russia After the War*, 18.

<sup>14</sup>*Ibid.*

<sup>15</sup>Robert Huhn Jones, *The Roads to Russia: United States Lend-Lease to the Soviet Union* (Norman: University of Oklahoma Press, 1969), 265 and 269. One of President F.D. Roosevelt’s suppositions about Lend-Lease was that it would guarantee Stalin’s cooperation in the postwar period.

<sup>16</sup>Interview with Eduard Ivaniyan, historian at the USA-Canada Institute in Moscow, November 27, 2002.

World War II also played an important role in increasing the chances for personal contact with the outside world. These personal experiences of Red Army units in the West with alternative realities had an enormous impact. In 1954, Oleg Anisimov, a Soviet émigré, claimed that the Soviet people were disillusioned with their realities now that they had firsthand knowledge that life was better elsewhere. Seeing the Baltic States, Eastern Poland, Rumania, Hungary, Czechoslovakia, and Germany during World War II had altered people's worldviews: "And they remember Lend-Lease. Personal observations naturally carry more weight for the Soviet man than the broadcasts of Radio Moscow. These observations have made him very critical of the Soviet economic system."<sup>17</sup> Moreover, the American alliance had contributed to the success of big-band jazz during the Second World War, when American classics, such as "All of Me," and "Sunny Side of the Street," were in the repertoires of several American style Soviet front bands. During the war, American music thrived on the Soviet frontline, and many remembered this cultural freedom fondly in the postwar years.<sup>18</sup> Therefore, the Kremlin also had to consider ordinary people's hopes for better times after the war. As Dmitry and Vladimir Shlapentokh posited, "Stalin's ideological policy in the postwar period was directed mostly to the prevention of any dissent in the country."<sup>19</sup>

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<sup>17</sup>Oleg Anisimov, "The Attitude of the Soviet People toward the West," *Russian Review* 13, no. 2 (1954): 86.

<sup>18</sup>Richard Stites, "Frontline Entertainment," in Richard Stites, ed. *Culture and Entertainment in Wartime Russia* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1995), 133-34.

<sup>19</sup>Shlapentokh and Shlapentokh, *Soviet Cinematography*, xx.

The Great Patriotic War also marked a turning point within the Soviet Union because of the nationalistic and patriotic values it promoted.<sup>20</sup> Indeed, it has been argued that the Second World War replaced the 1917 Revolution as the foundational myth of Soviet society during the postwar area.<sup>21</sup> The Soviet form of patriotism—a combination of 1930s Russian nationalism and Soviet socialism—that evolved after the war now became a staple of Communist propaganda and a major factor in the anti-Western atmosphere fostered in the postwar period.<sup>22</sup> Earlier observers of the Soviet Union noted how Soviet propaganda traditionally focused on bipolar “us versus them” strategies and emphasized Soviet patriotism and solidarity with international workers, framed as proletarian internationalism. The Soviet habit of thinking in terms of us versus them had left a vacuum at the end of the war. The renewed and rising hopes posed potential danger to the government.<sup>23</sup> Stalin saw the pending Cold War as an opportunity to unite the Soviet people against a new enemy: Soviet propaganda now fought against the “reactionary ideology of American imperialism” under the umbrella of antic cosmopolitanism.<sup>24</sup>

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<sup>20</sup>For information on Agitprop propaganda to promote patriotism see: “Plan meropriatii po propagande sredi naseleniia idei sovetskogo patriotizma. Dokument Agitpropa TsK” in D. G. Nadzhafov, *Stalin i kosmopolitizm: Dokumenty Agitpropa TsK KPSS, 1945-1953* (Moscow: Materik, 2005), 110-16.

<sup>21</sup>David Brandenberger, *National Bolshevism: Stalinist Mass Culture and the Formation of Modern Russian National Identity, 1931-1956* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2002). Amir Weiner, “The Making of a Dominant Myth: The Second World War and the Construction of Political Identities within the Soviet Polity,” *Russian Review* 55, no. 4 (1996): 638-60.

<sup>22</sup>Dmitry Shlapentokh and Vladimir Shlapentokh, *Soviet Cinematography, 1918-1991: Ideological Conflict and Social Reality* (New York: A. de Gruyter, 1993), 121.

<sup>23</sup>Zubkova, *Russia After the War*, 19.

<sup>24</sup>Frederick C. Barghoorn, “The Image of Russia in Soviet Propaganda,” in Waldemar Gurian, *Soviet Imperialism: Its Origins and Tactics* (Notre Dame, IN: University of Notre Dame Press, 1953). Here pp. 141-42.

In a speech in the fall of 1945, Stalin denounced “servility before the modern bourgeois culture of the West,”<sup>25</sup> an image that remained in Soviet public language at least throughout the 1950s.<sup>26</sup> The resulting postwar patriotic fervor became a vehicle for the anti-Western campaign in the Soviet Union. Simultaneously, the idea of a “Soviet reality,” embracing the concept of a model socialist society was at the heart of the antic cosmopolitan campaign. As Vladimir Shlapentokh has argued:

In its mythological activity, Soviet ideology exerts special efforts to impose an artificial, ‘secondary’ reality on the Soviet people. The Soviet people are suggested to live already in a world in which Soviet mythological values are implemented in life, and they, as well as their leaders, behave as these values demand. Therefore, public ideology is especially persistent in hammering away at various fictitious images of Soviet life as well as in describing life in the West in a negative way.<sup>27</sup>

Myth making was certainly a powerful tool in the Soviet state.<sup>28</sup> By 1946, a newspaper issue that did not include some indignant story of American imperialism or exploitation of its working class was hard to find. The papers recounted evil imperialistic political and economic strategies, criticizing social conditions in the United States of America, especially racial prejudice and social inequality. Bourgeois and hollow, its culture was decadent and overall degrading to Soviet values. Gone were the years of the 1920s and the 1930s when

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<sup>25</sup>Gorlizki and Khlevniuk, *Cold Peace*, 34.

<sup>26</sup>E. S. Afanas'eva and V. Iu Afiani, *Ideologicheskie komissii TsK KPSS 1958-1964: Dokumenty* (Moscow: Rosspen, 1998), 126-35.

<sup>27</sup>Vladimir Shlapentokh, *Soviet Public Opinion and Ideology: Mythology and Pragmatism in Interaction* (New York: Praeger, 1986), xii.

<sup>28</sup>Early on, the Soviet Union became known throughout the world for its propaganda techniques and Soviet methods of mass mobilization have been studied in depth. See Jeffrey Brooks, *Thank You, Comrade Stalin! Soviet Public Culture From Revolution to Cold War* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 2000); David L. Hoffmann, *Stalinist Values: The Cultural Norms of Soviet Modernity, 1917-1941* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 2003); Peter Kenez, *The Birth of the Propaganda State: Soviet Methods of Mass Mobilization, 1917-1929* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1985); Clive Rose, *The Soviet Propaganda Network: A Directory of Organisations Serving Soviet Foreign Policy* (London and New York: Pinter Publishers, St. Martin's Press, 1988).



American industrial technology was openly praised.<sup>29</sup> By 1947, the official party line reduced the American wartime alliance to a vague memory as it steadfastly adhered to the anti-Americanism that had become the order of the day.<sup>30</sup>

Archival material allows Russian authors Khlevniuk and Gorlizki to conclude that the anticosmopolitan campaign was designed by Stalin himself but carried out by his ideological chief, Andrei Zhdanov.<sup>31</sup> The *Zhdanovshchina*, as the period of this campaign has come to be known, was started in order to “discipline the Soviet intelligentsia,” and its beginning was marked by the well-known purges of poet Anna Akhmatova and writer Mikhail Zoshchenko. The *Zhdanovshchina*, however, soon turned into the anti-Semitic, anti-American campaign of the postwar years. At the establishment of Cominform, the Information Bureau of the Communist and Labor Parties in September 1947, Zhdanov drew a picture of the world divided into two opposing camps. Just as Winston Churchill had done in the West a year earlier and Truman in March 1947, Zhdanov now confirmed that this would become the guiding thesis of Soviet foreign propaganda during the years of high Stalinism, 1947-53.<sup>32</sup>

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<sup>29</sup>Alan M. Ball, *Imagining America: Influence and Images in Twentieth-Century Russia* (Lanham, MD: Rowman & Littlefield, 2003), xx.

<sup>30</sup>Brooks’s *Thank You Comrade Stalin!* provides an excellent overview of the newspaper discourse under Stalin, as does McKenna, *All the Views Fit to Print*.

<sup>31</sup>In a recent study of the ruling elite during the early Cold War, Yoram Gorlizki and Oleg Khlevniuk, maintain that Stalin orchestrated the anticosmopolitan campaign Zhdanov, who has previously been credited with being the brain behind the campaign, acted on Stalin’s behalf. Yoram Gorlizki and Oleg Khlevniuk, *Cold Peace*, 32 and 34.

<sup>32</sup>Dmitrii Volkogonov, *Stalin: Triumph and Tragedy* (London: Weidenfeld and Nicholson, 1991), 34. For a good overview of new research on postwar Soviet anti-Semitism see David Brandenberger, “Stalin’s Last Crime? Recent Scholarship on Postwar Soviet Antisemitism and the Doctor’s Plot,” in *Kritika: Explorations in Russian and Eurasian History* 6, 1 (2005): 187-204. Brandenberger disagrees with Gorlizki and Khlevniuk about the importance of Stalin in creating the anticosmopolitan campaign.

Spreading propaganda became so incorporated into everyday life and so intertwined with Soviet culture that these concepts need to be understood as part of one and the same goal: the mission of rallying the Soviet nation around the cause of Communism and promoting Soviet patriotism.<sup>33</sup> Furthermore, this goal was extended to proletarian internationalism, central to the Soviet project. In Marxist phraseology, the term “bourgeois nationalism” came to designate the number one enemy of proletarian internationalists. With the rise of the Cold War, “bourgeois imperialism” became the poison for which Soviet patriotic reality was supposed to provide an antidote. Not surprisingly, the United States of America became the embodiment of “bourgeois imperialism” in the postwar period, when adjectives such as “evil” or “rotten” usually preceded any mention of it.<sup>34</sup>

The Soviet state measured itself against America in every way possible: politically, culturally, socially, and economically. This comparison extended to such fields as sports,<sup>35</sup> lifestyles, the hard sciences, and the arts. In fact, no facet of Soviet society escaped comparison and competition with the “bourgeois” and “evil” America. The Soviet people were expected to follow the official script when making mention of the United States, but, as we shall see in chapter 2, the case of Liuba was by no means unique: Soviet authorities prosecuted thousands of people who in one way or another spoke out against the official myth of America. The high point of the neurotic and destructive comparison with America

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<sup>33</sup>Kenez, *The Birth of the Propaganda State*, 1. Soviet culture emphasized mass mobilization and indoctrination and Vadim Volkov argues that words such as enlightenment, education, civilization, literature, and spirituality are used in the Russian culture as synonymous with culture. Volkov, “The Concept of *kul'turnost'*,” 212.

<sup>34</sup>RGASPI, f. 17, op. 132, d. 234, ll. 27-28.

<sup>35</sup>For concern about American superiority in sports, see RGASPI, f. 17, op. 125, d. 309, ll. 23-30.

coincided with the years of high Stalinism, during which the foundation of contemporary Russian anti-Americanism was laid.<sup>36</sup>

### **The Two Americas: Anti-Americanism in the Theaters**

In Soviet parlance, the good America was dubbed “the second America,” inhabited by “progressive Americans against the warmongers.”<sup>37</sup> This portrayal of a dual America is perhaps most demonstrably found in Konstantin Simonov’s anti-American play *The Russian Question* (*Russkii vopros*), written in 1946, first performed in 1947, and filmed in 1948. *The Russian Question* was without a doubt the most famous anti-American stage production in the postwar years. It highlighted in very simple terms the themes that were to become most prevalent in the anti-American campaign. The greedy, imperialist, capitalist faction, often simply referred to as “Wall Street,” was juxtaposed to the “second America,” inhabited by socially progressive people favorably disposed toward the Soviet Union.

Coinciding with the starting point of the postwar anti-American campaign in the arts, *The Russian Question* was set in President Harry S. Truman’s postwar America and depicted greedy “Wall Street” players who repressed the honest, real Americans, embodied in the persona of Harry Smith.<sup>38</sup> In the last monologue, right before the curtain falls, the “good American” Harry Smith announces his epiphany: there are two Americas. He wants to find a

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<sup>36</sup>Paul Hollander, *Understanding Anti-Americanism: Its Origins and Impact at Home and Abroad* (Chicago: Ivan R. Dee, 2004), 240; Barry Rubin and Judith Colp Rubin, *Hating America: A History* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2004), 198-99.

<sup>37</sup>RGASPI, f. 17, op. 132, d. 234, ll. 54-55.

<sup>38</sup>John N. Washburn, *Soviet Theater: Its Distortion of America's Image, 1921 to 1973* (Chicago: American Bar Association, 1973), 22. See also chapter nineteen in Michel Gordey, *Visa to Moscow* (New York: Knopf, 1952), 147-52.

place in the “America of Abraham Lincoln, in the America of Franklin Roosevelt.”<sup>39</sup>

Because of the wartime alliance, Roosevelt was generally looked upon favorably in the Soviet Union. His successor, President Harry S. Truman, however, came to symbolize the bad America. Associated with the Truman Doctrine and the Marshall Plan, Truman became an obvious target of anti-American sentiments in the postwar period, because of both his international actions and his domestic politics. With the emerging Cold War, he came to embody the “imperialistic” aspirations of the United States in the Soviet Union.

*The Russian Question* (along with the film *The Meeting on the Elbe*) set the tone for the ways the Soviet public was supposed to remember and treat the former ally.<sup>40</sup> In theory, it was easy for Soviet agitators to manipulate the strongly rooted feelings of hatred toward Germans and subtly suggest that such sentiments be transferred to Americans. They worked hard at trying to convince Soviet audiences that the Americans had forgotten all about the common enemy and now focused their aggression on the Soviet Union.<sup>41</sup> While some accounts state that transferring paradigms of the enemy from Germany to America did not fully succeed, the hatred for Germans being so deep that it was not easily transferred, there is much evidence that supports the notion that the rumor of a new war terrified some Soviet citizens.<sup>42</sup> *The Russian Question* manipulated this fear extraordinarily well. The “evil capitalists” want Harry Smith to write an account of a Russian war threat, but he resists,

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<sup>39</sup>*Russkii vopros*, directed by Mikhail Il'ich Romm (Moscow: Mosfil'm, 1947).

<sup>40</sup>David Caute, *The Dancer Defects: The Struggle for Cultural Supremacy During the Cold War* (Oxford and New York: Oxford University Press, 2003), 135.

<sup>41</sup>*Ibid.*, 95.

<sup>42</sup>Zubkova, *Russia After the War*, *passim*.

concluding that the Russians desire peace more than anything. The real warmongers in the story turn out to be the bad Americans.<sup>43</sup> It may have been hard for the Soviet people to imagine that the comradely feelings of the meeting on the Elbe—of the whole alliance for that matter—had been abandoned by the American side, but the memory of the war itself and the sufferings of the Soviet population probably made them more susceptible to rumors of a renewed war and thus troubled by the purported machinations of the former ally.

*The Russian Question* was writer and journalist Simonov's most anti-American work. A favorite of the Kremlin, he had served as a war correspondent during World War II. His favored status allowed him to travel; in 1946, he had gone on the first of three trips to the United States. In writing about these travels, Simonov dutifully reported on the dual America. He maintained, for example, that the Communist witch-hunts of the McCarthy era in the United States only confirmed "the political and social pressure" he had written about in *The Russian Question*.<sup>44</sup>

With the help of Simonov and others, the anti-American campaign was already off to a good start in 1947, especially in the theatres. By 1948, anti-Americanism was so thoroughly a part of every form of art in the Soviet Union that even a film with such a clear and strong anti-American message as *The Russian Question* could be "improved" to make the message even stronger. In a February 1948 report, Aleksander Egolin,<sup>45</sup> a literary critic at the Academy of Sciences, maintained that the 1948 Mikhail Romm film adaptation of Simonov's

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<sup>43</sup>For detailed information about *The Russian Question* see Caute, *The Dancer Defects*, 88-116.

<sup>44</sup>Caute, *The Dancer Defects*, 112.

<sup>45</sup>A. M. Egolin was deputy chief of Agitprop from 1944-47. As of January 1948, he was director of the Institute for Global Literature at the Academy of Sciences (IMLI AN SSSR). See Nadzhafov, *Stalin i kosmopolitizm*, 682.

play suffered “from essential shortcomings.” He stated that, at the time of writing the play, Simonov had incorporated important international events into it, which the producers of the film had left out:

American imperialism is shown only in one way in the film, as the politics of a capitalist upper class, directed against the USSR and communism. It does not show the responsibility of capitalists for the approaching economic crisis in the USA—the terror, dictated by expansionist politics, aimed at weakening rivals, with the goal of capturing and enslaving free nations and instituting the global dominance of the dollar. The film does not expose the attempts of American imperialism to camouflage the aggressive tendencies of anticommunism and anti-Soviet politics.<sup>46</sup>

Egolin claimed the film did not have an “offensive but a defensive character.” The film, he wrote, should have taken better advantage of the possibilities to cast light on the varieties of American imperialism and evilness. He continued:

The film underlines only that the USSR does not want war. It insufficiently shows that American imperialism now has a stronghold on the global reaction, is preparing war, and that the USSR has an iron grip on peace, that communists of all countries expose and reject the criminal conspiracy of the imperialists against peace.<sup>47</sup>

According to Egolin, Harry Smith and his stenographer, Meg, who personified the progressive America in *The Russian Question*, paled to the portrayals of the reactionary American embodied in the work by the publishers MacPherson and Gould. The reactionary Americans were, in his opinion, disproportionably strong and tough. He blamed this shortcoming of the film partly on the main actors, especially actor Aksenov’s “unconvincing portrayal” of Harry Smith. Of course, Harry Smith’s role was the most important one as he was sympathetic to the Soviet Union and had to be convincing. On behalf of the Council of Arts at the Academy of Sciences, Egolin recommended that the film be redone. The only

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<sup>46</sup>RGASPI, f. 17, op. 125, d. 639, ll. 5-7.

<sup>47</sup>RGASPI, f. 17, op. 125, d. 639, ll. 5-7.

positive thing he saw about the film was composers Aram Khatchaturian's musical score, which Egolin thought fit well with the "gloomy, barbarous character of the capitalist American city."<sup>48</sup> It is likely that such a critical review coming from a leading literary critic at the Academy of the Sciences had more to do with its leaders wanting to show their dedication to the all embracing anti-American campaign than anything else. The movie was not remade and seems to have been considered a hit in the anti-American genre, crystallizing Harry Smith's reputation as an "ideal American" in the Soviet Union for years to come.<sup>49</sup>

Agitprop authorities continued to strengthen and refine anti-Americanism's relationship with patriotism over the next few years. In December 1948, the general secretary of the Writer's Union, A. A. Fadeev, gave a speech on the "antipatriotic drama critics." In early 1949, the press publicly denounced the individuals accused of antipatriotic work in the theater,<sup>50</sup> and then, in the spring of 1949, the Committee for Agitation and Propaganda of the Central Committee issued several measures for strengthening anti-American propaganda. The measures called for more anti-American plays, books, variety shows, and circus skits.<sup>51</sup>

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<sup>48</sup>Ibid.

<sup>49</sup>Caute, *The Dancer Defects*, 112. In 1949, Simonov offered to write an anti-American play called "Gorky in America," which would be based on Gorky's own "ruthless criticism of America." Nothing seems to have come of this idea but Simonov's proposal to do this was in line with the call for more anti-American plays. See RGASPI, f. 17, op. 132, d. 235, ll. 27-29 for Simonov's letter to Malenkov.

<sup>50</sup>See the January and February issues of *Kul'tura i zhizn*, which was the Agitprop newspaper.

<sup>51</sup>The following documents detail the campaign for the strengthening of anti-American topics in the arts. RGASPI, f. 17, op. 132, d. 234, , ll. 26, 27-28, 29, 50-51, 52-53, 56-57, 58-62, 65-66, 67-68, 69-71, 72-74, 75, 76, 78-81, 82. They cover over half of 1949, starting at the end of March and continuing until mid-October. These documents detail topics and themes of plays, circus skits, variety shows, and ballet performances. The year 1949 definitely marked a highlight in efforts to strengthen anti-Americanism in the arts. For more on the strengthening of anti-Americanism, see the 1949 "Plan meropriatii po usileniiu antiamerikanskoi propagandy na blizhaishnee vremia," RGASPI, f. 17, op. 132, d. 224, ll. 48-52. This plan was all-inclusive and discusses measures to be taken in radio, public lectures, scientific publishing, political and economic topics, as well as in theatre, film, and the belles lettres.

It also called for up to four hundred “new plays on anti-American topics” to be on stage all over the Soviet Union by the end of the year. The ideal topics were already laid out in the plan, sometimes even assigned to a certain writer. Thus, N. F. Pogodin was called upon to write about “the activities of American warmongers,” N. E. Birte “about American intelligence activity,” and A. A. Surov “about the financial magnates of Wall Street.” K. M. Simonov, B. A. Lavrenev, L. R. Sheinin, and A. A. Perventseva were supposed to write plays “exposing contemporary America.”<sup>52</sup> The anti-American emphasis in the Soviet arts in the 1940s was certainly not new. What was new, however, was the level of initiative originating within the Communist Party on designing the subject matter and treatment of American topics. The Communist Party called on artists, playwrights, composers, and writers to “expose the reactionary politics and ideology of American imperialism and to dethrone bourgeois culture, customs, and way of life in contemporary America.”<sup>53</sup> This they did not

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<sup>52</sup>Along with *The Russian Question* and *Governor of the Provinces* (*Gubernator provintsii*, later filmed as *The Meeting on the Elbe*), *Ostrov mira* by E. Petrova, *Na toi storone* and *Serdtsa i dollar* by A. Levady were already playing in Moscow and Leningrad but also in some peripheral cities. RGASPI, f. 17, op. 132, d. 234, ll. 26 and 27-28. The plan showed that in addition to the plays already in the theaters, thirteen new ones were to be added, running in big cities like Moscow, Leningrad, and Gorky, while others were running in one hundred theatres in the provinces. These plays included “Zagovor obrechennykh” by N. Virta, which played in major theatres all over the country, a children’s play by S. Mikhalkov, “Ia khochu domoi,” which also played in twenty-five youth theatres in the provinces, in addition to showing at the Central Children’s Theater in Moscow and the Leningrad Theatre for Young Viewers. For a nonexhaustive list of anti-American plays, see Nikolai A. Gorchakov, *The Theater in Soviet Russia* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1957), p. 453: *Velikaia sila* (Great Force) by Boris Romashev, *Zakon chesti* (Law of Honor) by A. Shtein, *Dva lageria* (Two Camps) by August Iakobson, *Tsvet kozhi* (Color of Skin) by Bill-Belotserkovsky, *Mir* (Peace) by Eugene Dolmatovsky, *Liudi dobroi voli* (People of Good Will) by G. Mdivani, *Missuriiskii val’s* (Missouri Waltz) by Nikolai Pogodin, *Zemliak prezidenta* (Man from the President’s Home Region) by Anatoli Surov; *Chuzhaia ten’* (Alien Shadow) by Konstantin Simonov, *Zagovor obrechennykh* (Plot of the Condemned) by Nikolai Virta; *Ia khochu domoi* (I Want to Go Home) by Sergei Mikhalkov, *Osobniak v pereulke* (Lone House in the Alley) by the Tur brothers and L. Sheinin; *Mladshii partner* (Junior Partner) by Arkady Perventsov. During the 1940s, several American plays were adapted for the Soviet stage, for an overview see J. N. Washburn, *Soviet Theater: Its Distortion of America’s Image: 1921-1973* (Chicago: American Bar Association, 1973), 62.

<sup>53</sup>RGASPI, f. 17, op. 132, d. 234, ll. 26-28.



only by calling for general works; in some cases they also outlined the exact treatment a topic should get.<sup>54</sup>

Responding quickly to the call from above, playwright Boris A. Lavrenev finished the play *The Voice of America* (*Golos Ameriki*) in the spring of 1949.<sup>55</sup> Utilizing the comradely feelings between the Soviet and American people during the wartime alliance, *The Voice of America* relates the story of American Army Captain Walter Kidd, who, during the war, had gotten to know the “true character” of the Russian people. Upon returning to the United States, he became a suspect instead of a war hero and fell prey to the House Committee on Un-American Activities.<sup>56</sup> The play was initially staged in two Moscow theaters, the Red Army Theater and the Maly Theater. In 1950, however, the Maly Theater’s staging of the play came under heavy criticism. The stage designer, Isaak Rabinovich, had made scenery based on American illustrated magazines. Critics were dismayed that he was not able to recognize that the prosperity and beauty of life exhibited in these magazines was not in line with the America that had a place in Soviet official representation. As a Jew, Rabinovich became a victim of the broader antic cosmopolitanism campaign, but by using American clippings as props, he was also guilty of “groveling before the West.” In May 1950, critic Anastas’ev wrote in *Pravda* that “the luxurious halls and exotic views of the sea presented on the stage clearly do not correspond to the life of an honest toiler such as Walter Kidd and

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<sup>54</sup>RGASPI, f. 17, op. 132, d. 234, l. 26.

<sup>55</sup>RGASPI, f. 17, op. 132, d. 417, ll. 122-26 and RGASPI, f. 17, op. 132, d. 234, ll. 27-28 .

<sup>56</sup>Gorchakov, *The Theater in Soviet Russia*, 385. See also Boris Lavrenev’s play, *Golos Ameriki* in Vsevolod Vishnevskii, Sergei Mikhalkov, Konstantin Simonov, and Boris Lavrenev, *Sovetskaia dramaturgiia 1949: P’esy* (Moscow: Iskusstvo, 1950).

give a false and distorted presentation of life led by ordinary people in America.”<sup>57</sup>

Furthermore, some critics found flaw in the disposition and authenticity of the main hero,<sup>58</sup> and faulted Lavrenev for not having chosen an American Communist as the hero of the play. But he defended himself, claiming that he had chosen to write about the tragic fate of a private, “prosperous” American. He wanted his hero to have “apolitical, undecided, and backward liberal views.” Lavrenev’s goal was to show how this person came face to face with the “barbarian degradation of the capitalist America” and how he aligned himself in the camp “against the America of Truman and Wall Street.”<sup>59</sup>

At a September 1950 meeting of the Writer’s Union, playwright A. Surov expressed some reservations about the play, claiming that not just Lavrenev’s main character but also the handling of the topic was faulty. He described the play as “an advertisement for the ‘American way of life’ and the American army.”<sup>60</sup> Another critic, V. F. Zalesskii, did not find the character “cultured” enough for a socialist audience: “how were Soviet viewers expected to identify with ‘the fate of an American philistine’?” he asked. Imagine Lavrenev’s dismay. At his request, Fadeev of the Writers’ Union, a trusted Stalinist, had read the play and made three valuable comments, which Lavrenev had taken to heart. He was therefore understandably shocked at the kind of criticism he got from members of the Writers’ Union. Outraged that critics should find such basic flaws with his carefully written

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<sup>57</sup>A. Anastas’ev, “V zashchitu demokratii,” *Pravda*, May 16, 1950. Cited in Gorchakov, *Theater in Soviet Russia*, 386.

<sup>58</sup>RGASPI, f. 17, op. 132, d. 417, l. 121.

<sup>59</sup>RGASPI, f. 17, op. 132, d. 417, ll. 122-26.

<sup>60</sup>RGASPI, f. 17, op. 132, d. 417, l. 123.

anti-American play, Lavrenev turned to Stalin to clear his name and emphasize his support of the Soviet cause.<sup>61</sup>

In a letter to Stalin, Lavrenev claimed that, as a writer and publicist, he had always had a real interest in international politics. He felt strongly about the relevance of events in America for Soviet society, stating that “what is going on in America nowadays, the violent reactionary revelry, the impetuous fascism, the historical preparation of a new war against the Soviet Union” deeply concerns us. He was dismayed that A. A. Surkov had accused him of taking the easy way out by focusing on a non-Soviet theme: “I considered *The Voice of America* a timely, serious, and necessary political work. As a publicist devoted to international themes, I am used to thinking that the exposure of capitalism and the fight against it are significant and important, especially today, as objects of our literature.”<sup>62</sup> Working on such a topic was not easy, he said; if it was to be done well, it was probably more difficult than writing about Soviet topics. Lavrenev had put much work into the play. He researched materials related to American “spirit, humor, and everyday life” and, as was usual, submitted the final product to the Agitprop Committee of the Central Committee, which sanctioned it in April 1949. Finally, Lavrenev emphasized that of his six plays, “five cast light on Soviet life. Only *The Voice of America* brings forward themes of international politics, which nowadays are also Soviet and relevant themes.”<sup>63</sup>

The whole story spelled out in Lavrenev’s letter to Stalin shows well the kind of atmosphere in which the intelligentsia was working at the time. They struggled to make a

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<sup>61</sup>RGASPI, f. 17, op. 132, d. 417, ll. 122-26.

<sup>62</sup>Ibid.

<sup>63</sup>Ibid.

point about their devotion to the campaign of anti-Americanism and the overall fight against cosmopolitanism. If they could not directly contribute to it, they found flaws with the works of those who did, showing how they themselves would have done things more patriotically, in a more anti-American way. *The Voice of America* has been described as “violently anti-American,”<sup>64</sup> and it was clear from Lavrenev’s writing that it was intentionally so.

Understandably, Lavrenev was distraught to receive such harsh criticism to the contrary. He had written a thoroughly anti-American play but was still being attacked for not being patriotic enough.

Lavrenev’s experience was far from unique. In 1949 and 1950, suspicion and backstabbing dominated the circles of the intelligentsia.<sup>65</sup> Those involved in writing about the United States struggled to convince Agitprop authorities that their efforts were worthwhile. All performance arts of the period celebrated the socialist citizen and, correspondingly, looked upon foreigners with suspicion.<sup>66</sup> There was, however, a thin line between producing an anti-American play and a correct anti-American play. Asking Stalin to be the judge of one’s performance was, of course, the ultimate test. Although there is no evidence that Stalin ever replied to Lavrenev’s letter, there is evidence that Central

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<sup>64</sup>Gorchakov, *Theater in Soviet Russia*, 385.

<sup>65</sup>Maria Zezina, “Crisis in the Union of Soviet Writers in the Early 1950s” *Europe-Asia Studies* 46, no. 4 (1994): 649-61. See also Condee, “Cultural Codes of the Thaw” and Swayze, *Political Control of Literature in the USSR*. Swayze states that in the post Stalin period the party became “less successful than before in predetermining the impact of its literary policies and in suppressing manifestations of discontent among writers” (260). This was most noticeable in the hesitant acceptance and later violent rejection of literary works, such as Vladimir Dudintsev’s *Not By Bread Alone* (1956) and Alexander Solzhenitsyn’s *One Day of Ivan Denisovich* (1962), when the intelligentsia nervously waited for the authorities to express either admiration or dismay for the works published.

<sup>66</sup>Peter Kenez, *Cinema and Soviet Society: From the Revolution to the Death of Stalin* (London and New York: I.B. Tauris, 2001), 201.

Committee Secretary M. A. Suslov and historian and officer of the Central Committee on Literature and Art V. Kruzhkov, who also received letters from Lavrenev,<sup>67</sup> decided that Lavrenev was being truthful about the deficiencies of the actual performance of the play at the Maly Theater.

Indeed, theater came under strong attack in this atmosphere of antic cosmopolitanism but, along with the performance arts such as theater, cinema, the circus, and the variety show, the printed word was the preferred way to get anti-American views across to the population. Agitprop called upon publishing houses and journals to issue articles and brochures on the “rotten musical culture of contemporary America” and the “rotten contemporary American arts—in paintings, theatre, and music.”<sup>68</sup> Every side of American culture was to be criticized and maligned, emphasizing its bourgeois elements and lack of culture.

There were, however, those who questioned the Soviet Union’s ability to do this properly and expressed the need for more accurate knowledge about the United States. In a 1951 pronouncement “about the condition of scholarly work in American studies,”<sup>69</sup> several specialists on the United States complained that few Soviet students were interested in engaging in serious study of America. As a result, the Academy of Sciences suffered a shortage of highly qualified experts on the United States. The Institute of Economics had only nine specialists on America (both North and South), and there were only three each at the Institute of History, the Institute of Labor History, and the Institute of Law. Additionally, philosophers were poorly trained to study the ideology of American imperialism. Overall,

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<sup>67</sup>RGASPI, f. 17, op. 132, d. 417, ll. 127, 127ob, 128.

<sup>68</sup>RGASPI, f. 17, op. 132, d. 234, ll. 27-28.

<sup>69</sup>RGASPI, f. 17, op. 132, d. 452, ll. 37-39.

there was a complete lack of training of new specialists on America at the various institutes of the Academy of Sciences in Moscow and insufficient numbers of people already working in this important area. The specialists claimed that a center dedicated to scientific and scholarly research on America was necessary in order to increase both the quality of training and the number of people involved in the area. For this purpose, they wanted to put the study of American history, economics, domestic and foreign policy, and American imperialism under one administration.<sup>70</sup>

It would have benefited Agitprop had all study of the United States been moved to one center, but a separate Institute of the USA and Canada was established only in 1967.<sup>71</sup> Not only that, the Academy of Sciences may have seen an opportunity in the anti-American campaign to advance the Academy and secure a bigger budget for its research. Given the fact that the report was written around the time that the United States government started to finance the establishment of Russian and Soviet area studies centers, it would not have been surprising had the Soviet authorities reacted favorably to the proposal. The lack of responsiveness on the Soviet side, however, corresponded with the lack of organization in other areas of the Soviet bureaucracy. Taking into account the extreme anti-American atmosphere, the authors of the report may have put their careers at risk for even suggesting this reorganization.

The report also expressed much concern about the quality of published work on the United States. “The journals, as a rule, publish articles of low quality” and the authors of

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<sup>70</sup>RGASPI, f. 17, op. 132, d. 452, ll. 37-39.

<sup>71</sup>Robert D. English, *Russia and the Idea of the West: Gorbachev, Intellectuals, and the End of the Cold War* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2000), 125.

these articles seemed poorly qualified. The report criticized them for “not knowing enough about the bigger picture, the local circumstances, and foreign policy of the United States through different times in its history.” The scholars called for sounder work, thoroughly based on the theoretical framework of Marxism-Leninism, as there were some examples of “bourgeois objectivity,” or too much praise of the West, in recent studies.<sup>72</sup> Furthermore, the authors of the report pointed out how much Soviet scholars relied on translated books on American studies. While such books “have an indisputable role” for the study of all things American, they should not be considered “a substitute for Soviet literature” on the subject: “It should be a priority of the Soviet state to publish books in which all questions related to the development of the countries in the Americas would receive true Marxist-Leninist treatment.”<sup>73</sup> It is clear that a research institute on America, while beneficial in many areas, would also potentially have been a dangerous place at which to work. Even Soviet patriots would have a difficult time keeping up with and following present-day policies of the Soviet Communist Party, especially during times when the creation of knowledge about the United States was dictated from above.

### **Favorite Anti-American Authors**

While there was obvious concern about scholarly works on America, there was no apparent shortage of anti-American works, Soviet and foreign, in the field of literature. It was not always necessary to dictate topics and order new anti-American works; some Soviet

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<sup>72</sup>In 1952, 101 Soviet organizations received American periodical literature: 1238 titles were of a scientific and technical nature, 238 of a socioeconomic nature, and 3 titles had to do with the arts. RGASPI, f. 17, op. 132, d. 561, l. 59.

<sup>73</sup>RGASPI, f. 17, op. 132, d. 452, ll. 37-39.

works about America, written before the war, were of perfectly good use for the anti-American campaign. For instance, in 1949, Agitprop ordered variety shows and circus companies to include in their repertoires the “masters of dramatic readings,” instructing amateur performance groups to focus on literature and musical productions with anti-American themes. For this purpose, the Central Committee suggested to the Committee of the Arts of the Council of Ministers that they would encourage performance groups to include in their repertoires the writings of Maxim Gorky and the poems of Vladimir Mayakovsky.<sup>74</sup>

During the 1920s and 1930s, Gorky and Mayakovsky had both written extensively on the darker sides of American life and propaganda, and authorities correctly estimated that their work might also be useful in the postwar period. Gorky (1868-1936), one of the most popular writers in the Soviet Union and a founder of socialist realism<sup>75</sup> was a staunch supporter of the regime.<sup>76</sup> In 1948, *Kul'tura i zhizn'* (*Culture and Life*), the Agitprop newspaper, republished an old interview with Gorky.<sup>77</sup> The first question American correspondents had posed to Gorky was “Does your country hate America and what do you think about American

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<sup>74</sup>RGASPI, f. 17, op. 132, d. 234, ll. 52-53.

<sup>75</sup>Olga Peters Hasty and Susanne Fusso, *America Through Russian Eyes, 1874-1926* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1988), 128.

<sup>76</sup>Filia Holzmann, “A Mission That Failed: Gor'kij in America,” *Slavic and East European Journal* 6, no. 3 (1962): 227-35. Here p. 234. In 1949, the Central Committee discussed plans for filming *The City of the Yellow Devil*. In a letter to Stalin, Shepilov recommended two books to be adapted for the screen in order to produce more anti-American films. There are references to these plans for filming *The City of the Yellow Devil* in several documents from 1949. See RGASPI, f. 17, op. 132, d. 251, ll. 46-47, 53 and 54. The last document is also printed in Nadzhafov, *Stalin i kosmopolitizm*, 452-53.

<sup>77</sup>RGASPI, f. 17, op. 125, d. 610, l. 98.



civilization?” Gorky prefaced his answer by ironically pointing out the absurdity of the question:

Yes, my country, my nation, hates America, all of its people, workers and millionaires, the colored and the white. We hate women and children, fields and rivers, beasts and birds, the past and the present of your country, its science and schools, its great technology, Luther Burbank, Edgar Allen Poe, Walt Whitman, Washington and Lincoln, Theodore Dreiser, E. O’Neil, and Sherwood Anderson. We hate all the talented artists and the beautiful romances of Bret Hart and Jack London. We hate Thoreau, Emerson, and everything that is the USA, and everyone who lives in these states.

Pointing out that the potential for admiration was to be found in the “second America,”

Gorky suggested that, like the Soviet Union, the progressive America was peaceful and its people lived in harmony. Gorky had reservations about

what you call American civilization. . . . I think that your civilization is the most revolting civilization on our planet, because it so monstrously exaggerates all the different and shameful deformities of European civilization. Europe has enough tragically corrupted sons because of its own class structure, but all of Europe does not have the possibilities of such harmful and senseless actions, as your billionaires, millionaires, and such people, who give your country a degenerate name.<sup>78</sup>

Agitprop clearly considered this interview a good contribution to the anti-American campaign. A famous Europhile, Gorky emphasized the peace-loving nature of the Soviet people while contrasting the acceptable, “second America” to the otherwise “degenerate” parts of the United States. In reading materials produced by and for the Agitprop

Commission during the years of the fight against cosmopolitanism, it becomes clear that the ability to express oneself in ideologically correct language was an important skill.

Anthropologist Alexei Yurchak has suggested that “ideological literacy,” which he defines as the “technical skill of reproducing the precise passages and structures of that language in

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<sup>78</sup>RGASPI, f. 17, op. 125, d. 610, ll. 101-4.

one's text and speeches," became the absolute dominant form of expression in the party.<sup>79</sup>

Gorky's text was a good example of this, highlighting well the contrasts between the positive and the negative and using imagery so vivid that no one could doubt the correct way of thinking about the United States.

Another favorite of the anti-American campaign, Mayakovsky, had written a travelogue after his 1925 trip to the United States. The book, *My Discovery of America*, although somewhat rushed, was extremely popular. Moreover, he traveled widely in the Soviet Union to talk about the United States after his experiences there in the 1920s. In 1949, the Agitprop commission republished the book in a run of 250,000 copies, because "it tears the mask off what has been called 'the American way of life'" and uncovers "the monstrous exploitation of workers and dreams about global dominance." Furthermore, the book offered a good account of the falsity of "bourgeois democracy," "bourgeois freedom," and "the corruption of bourgeois culture and morals."<sup>80</sup> Be that as it may, the authorities worried that "Mayakovsky's text can at times be understood incorrectly," noting two or three places where the reader might have problems understanding Mayakovsky's relationship with America.<sup>81</sup> It is likely that these "flaws" were most visible in parts where the author called indirect attention to American progress. Although Mayakovsky wrote about the Ku Klux Klan and workers on strike, he also described "well-kept roads crawling with Fords" and

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<sup>79</sup>Alexei Yurchak, *Everything Was Forever, Until It Was No More: The Last Soviet Generation* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 2006), 48.

<sup>80</sup>RGASPI, f. 17, op. 132, d. 133, l. 48.

<sup>81</sup>RGASPI, f. 17, op. 132, d. 133, ll. 48 and 49.

“various structures of the technological fantasy-land.”<sup>82</sup> However, *My Discovery of America* was still considered one of the classics of anti-American literature, and it kept its status throughout the 1950s.

Ilya Ehrenburg was another favorite to rise onto the scene of anti-American writers in the postwar period. After visiting the U.S. in 1946 as a part of a small delegation, Ehrenburg wrote several articles for the government newspaper *Izvestiia* about his travels in the deep American South. His first articles were unusual in the sense that they conveyed hope about the future of race relations in the United States and admiration for American technology.<sup>83</sup> In 1947, when he published a small book, *In America*, about his experiences in America, his descriptions were less positive.<sup>84</sup> The 1947 version, however, fell under attack at the Writers’ Union in 1949. The Writers’ Union Press announced it would not republish *In America*, because it was “out of date.” In 1949, Ehrenburg had also written a brochure on “the American Way of Life” including new essays as well as articles he had already published in *Pravda* and *Kul’tura i zhizn’*. The brochure, *Nights of America*, started with Ehrenburg claiming that in his earlier writings, he had held himself back. Now, however, he would recount all the negative things he had learned in the United States.<sup>85</sup> *Nights of America* was never published. Earlier observers concluded that “the book was consistent

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<sup>82</sup>Vladimir Mayakovsky, *My Discovery of America* (London: Hesperus Press, 2005), 42 and 80.

<sup>83</sup>Joshua Rubenstein, *Tangled Loyalties: The Life and Times of Ilya Ehrenburg* (New York: BasicBooks, 1996), 238 and 241.

<sup>84</sup>Rubenstein, *Tangled Loyalties*, 241. For more on Ehrenburg’s experiences in the United States, see chapter 3. Ehrenburg also lectured on his 1946 experiences in the United States and in France. He was critical of both the United States and its people. He spent much energy talking about the unculturedness of Americans as opposed to the culturedness of the French people. For a transcript of a 1946 speech, see Rossiiskii gosudarstvennyi arkhiv literatury i iskusstva, hereafter RGALI, f. 631, op. 14, d. 56, ll. 2-36.

<sup>85</sup>Rubenstein, *Tangled Loyalties*, 241.

with Soviet propaganda and could easily have been printed.”<sup>86</sup> In reality, however, *Nights of America* was not up to par with anti-American standards because it did “not sufficiently address the second America.”<sup>87</sup>

Ilya Ehrenburg’s biographers agree that, in Stalin’s time, he went to great lengths to compromise his views in order to please the state.<sup>88</sup> In many instances, Ehrenburg was instrumental in executing the state’s stance on anti-Americanism, such as in 1947 when his articles in *Kul’tura i zhizn’* marked the beginning of the Soviet response to the radio broadcasts of the Voice of America.<sup>89</sup> In 1949, however, even Ilya Ehrenburg’s work was not up to the most recent anti-American standards. Ehrenburg appealed to the Central Committee, because he believed he had provided readers with enough information “to give them contempt and hatred for the ‘American Way of Life’ and its apologists.”<sup>90</sup> But I. Slepov, representing the Writers’ Union Press, advised the Central Committee to urge Ehrenburg to rewrite his book, which had severe problems: “The limitations of the book lie in the absence of explicit borders between simple Americans and their oppressors.” Slepov complained that Ehrenburg did not include any discussion of lynchings and that some of his

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<sup>86</sup>Ibid.

<sup>87</sup>RGASPI, f. 17, op. 132, d. 233 l. 14.

<sup>88</sup>In addition to Rubenstein’s *Tangled Loyalties* see Julian L. Layuchuk, *Ilya Ehrenburg: An Idealist in an Age of Realism* (Bern: Peter Lang Publishers, Inc., 1991), 216-39. Furthermore, I agree with Kremmentsov’s conclusions about one of the most highly-publicized case of antipatriotism during the late 1940s, the case of cancer researchers Nina Kliueva and Grigorii Roskin that Soviet researchers or writers had to comply with the system’s rules. Nikolai Kremmentsov, *The Cure: A Story of Cancer and Politics from the Annals of the Cold War* (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 2002), 211. If they wanted to keep writing, authors like Konstantin Simonov and Ilya Ehrenburg had to ascribe to the patriotic, anti-American themes required by the Soviet authorities.

<sup>89</sup>See *Kul’tura i zhizn’*, April 10 and 20, 1947.

<sup>90</sup>RGASPI, f. 17, op. 132, d. 233 l. 14.

claims about ordinary Americans not wanting war were outrageous. He had also suggested that “hatred for Negroes” was not only a typically American problem but had a global character. Slepov suggested Ehrenburg should rework the manuscript and eliminate such passages.<sup>91</sup> The manuscript was never published.

After 1949, such polemics were not as prominent at the Central Committee level, but the paranoia and fear that dominated intellectual circles and contributed to the production of anti-American works first started to die down only after Stalin’s death in 1953. By then, the theaters had plenty of anti-American plays to choose from—several anti-American plays had been written in the early 1950s to emphasize the beastly behavior of Americans in Korea—in addition to classics such as *The Russian Question* and *Governor of the Provinces*, which had both been filmed by the end of the 1940s.<sup>92</sup> Additionally, Agitprop kept lists of acceptable anti-American books, which dealt with the horrific nature of “American imperialism.” Finally, the Soviet media continued to cast the United States as an evil other. In short, anti-Americanism stayed in the Soviet performance arts, in literature, and in the media.

### **Acceptable Americans**

Under Stalin, access to American culture was limited, and the myth of America was based mostly on Russian or Soviet works. A few American books, however, remained in circulation during the postwar period, mainly because their message was in line with the Soviet anti-American policy. American writers and performers who maintained a good relationship with the Soviet Union during Stalin’s last years were usually “friends of the

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<sup>91</sup>RGASPI, f. 17, op. 132, d. 233, ll. 15-16.

<sup>92</sup>Gorchakov, *The Theater in Soviet Russia*, 386. *Governor of the Provinces* was filmed as *The Meeting on the Elbe*.

Soviet Union” or “fellow travelers,” but several American writers deemed acceptable by Russian and Soviet authorities had contributed to the Soviet myth about America. In 1949, when the Central Committee encouraged performance groups to turn to earlier Russian classics, they also recommended the works of some “progressive American writers.”<sup>93</sup>

Acceptable American writers did not necessarily write within a Marxist-Leninist framework, but they wrote critically on subjects such as race relations or poverty in the United States. The Soviets dubbed them “progressive,” and both in the Soviet Union and back home these writers were seen as the main critics of American social and racial issues. Several “progressive” American writers had long been popular in Russia and the Soviet Union.<sup>94</sup> Many of the American writers accepted by the Soviet authorities had at some point in their lives found the ideology of the Soviet Union appealing. Some of them had a longstanding fascination with the Soviet Union and even visited the country. Paul Hollander reminds us that the appeal of the Soviet Union remained widespread in the late 1920s and throughout the Second World War.<sup>95</sup> Several “fellow-travelers” turned their backs on the Soviet Union, but many remained sympathetic to the Soviet cause throughout their lives. Their political beliefs, however, are not the issue here, but rather how they or their works contributed to the Soviet image of America in the postwar period.

Between 1917 and 1957, American literature was translated into fifty languages in the Soviet Union. Two hundred and eighteen authors were translated and 2,572 titles and

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<sup>93</sup>RGASPI, f. 17, op. 132, d. 234, ll. 52-53.

<sup>94</sup>For an overview and biographies of several popular and accepted American writers such as Howard Fast, Sinclair Lewis, Upton Sinclair, and Langston Hughes, see RGALI, f. 631, op. 14, d. 1151.

<sup>95</sup>Paul Hollander, *Political Pilgrims: Western Intellectuals in Search of the Good Society* (New Brunswick, NJ: Transaction Publishers, 1998), 103.

editions were published in 77,159,000 copies. Only the French, who had 129,284,000 copies of over four thousand titles by over four hundred authors published, surpassed the publication of American-authored volumes in the Soviet Union. In a study of Russians and their favorite books, a Soviet librarian said that “the level of popularity a Western writer enjoys among us Russians corresponds to the level of our interest in his home country.” She cautioned, however, that “interest in a country does not necessarily coincide with sympathy for it.”<sup>96</sup> Seeing that most of the American authors or books about the United States published in the Soviet Union ranged from being critical of American society to hostile, there is certainly no evidence to the contrary: Soviet readers did not get a chance to read much glowing praise of the United States.

Most anyone who enjoyed literature in the Soviet Union would have been familiar with Jack London’s short stories or Upton Sinclair’s novels.<sup>97</sup> Jack London’s works were published in editions of over eleven million copies in twenty-nine languages of the USSR; Upton Sinclair’s work was printed in almost three million copies in fifteen languages. The works of Mark Twain and John Steinbeck were also known to many, as were those of Seton Thompson, O. Henry, Howard Fast, Theodore Dreiser, James Fenimore Cooper, Erskine Caldwell, Sinclair Lewis, Edgar Allen Poe, John Steinbeck, Walt Whitman, and Langston Hughes. Many of these authors were read in the years leading up to the Second World War and continued to be available in the postwar period in print runs that ranged from just over a

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<sup>96</sup>Klaus Mehnert, *The Russians & Their Favorite Books* (Stanford, CA: Hoover Institution Press Stanford University, 1983), 94.

<sup>97</sup>Soviet propaganda authorities, however, encouraged Soviet literary scholars to write about the influence of, for example, Tolstoy and Gorky on American writers such as Theodore Dreiser, Upton Sinclair, and Jack London. See Gleb Struve, “Anti-Westernism in Recent Soviet Literature,” *Yale Review* 39, no. 2 (1949), 214.

hundred thousand copies for Langston Hughes to several million copies of works by Jack London and Mark Twain.<sup>98</sup> Standing before American audiences in 1949, General Secretary of the Writer's Union Fadeev claimed that these numbers should be seen as proof that the Soviet people embraced American culture.<sup>99</sup> But most of the American authors printed in the Soviet Union were only accepted because they criticized American culture and politics in a way that was satisfactory to the Soviet authorities.

Several of these authors participated in the National Council for American-Soviet Friendship (NCASF, the most important Soviet front organization in the United States) and cultivated a strong relationship with the Soviet Union, visiting the country any chance they got and writing about the Soviet Union for an American audience. These people were extremely valuable for Soviet authorities, because their major strategy in reaching foreign audiences was through these "friends of the Soviet Union." It was only after Stalin's death that Soviet authorities realized this technique was bankrupt; Soviet propaganda preached to the converted and did not reach an audience outside of the narrow circles of these special friends. During the postwar Stalin years, though, "fellow travelers" were almost the only people to visit the country, and the National Council for American-Soviet Friendship sponsored most of the Americans who traveled to the Soviet Union.<sup>100</sup>

Since the Communist Party of the United States valued the same kind of literature as the Soviet propaganda authorities, it is not surprising that the names of the most popular foreign

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<sup>98</sup>David Caute, *The Fellow-Travelers: A Postscript to the Enlightenment* (New York: Macmillan, 1973), 12.

<sup>99</sup>*American and Soviet Leaders meet at the American Cultural and Scientific Conference for World Peace, New York, 1949. Addresses by Fadeev, Shostakovich, Oparin* (San Francisco: American Russian Institute, 1949), 6.

<sup>100</sup>GARF, f. 5283, op. 14, d. 573.



authors in the Soviet Union were also to be found on the black lists of the American government in the postwar period. In 1953 books by Mark Twain, Theodore Dreiser, Henry Wallace, Howard Fast, and W.E.B. Du Bois were removed from the shelves of American governmental libraries abroad. Furthermore, in 1949 Norman Mailer and Arthur Miller also fell out of favor with the American government for supporting the Cultural And Scientific Conference for World Peace in New York. The conference was organized by left-wing and Communist American writers and artists who had backed Henry Wallace in the presidential election of 1948, and the American government perceived it as a Communist initiative. In the 1950s, Erskine Caldwell and Ernest Hemingway also made the anti-American lists of the U.S. government. Simultaneously, Hemingway became a cult figure and enjoyed much popularity in the Soviet Union in the 1960s.<sup>101</sup>

Not all American books published in the Soviet Union were of high quality. Melville J. Ruggles, then vice president of the Council of Library Resources, visited the Soviet Union in 1960 and researched the state of publishing and the contents of Soviet library stacks, so to speak. In evaluating the quality of the American authors available to Soviet readers, Ruggles stated: “The appetite of Soviet publishers for literature critical of the American system is apparently not satisfied by left-wing American writers who can write. It leads them to scrape the bottom of the barrel.”<sup>102</sup> He went on to say, that

The image of America projected by the American literature published in the USSR, however, seems to be fairly clear. . . . The America that the Russian knows from the American literature available to him is a land of Simon Legree, the coonskip cap, the heroic sled dog, the share cropper, the sweatshop, the dispirited, defeated, and

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<sup>101</sup>Richard H. Pells, *Not Like Us: How Europeans Have Loved, Hated, and Transformed American Culture Since World War II* (New York: BasicBooks, 1997), 80-81.

<sup>102</sup>Melville J. Ruggles, “American Books in Soviet Publishing,” *Slavic Review* 20, no. 3 (1961): 428.

depraved, the frivolous, the bloated billionaire, the regimented traveler in space. The American literature he is given opportunity to read conveys to him little notion of how we think, of how we live, of our true virtues or of our true faults.<sup>103</sup>

A study of American characters in Russian fiction reached a similar conclusion about the accuracy of the characters depicted. The “Upper-Class Lady” was either envied, hated or despised, while the “Working-Class and the Middle-Class Woman” was admired and pitied. Similarly, American businessmen and millionaires, hated in pre-Napoleonic times and ignored in the early nineteenth century, ranged from being hated to strongly hated to despised as of the 1860s. In Kiparsky’s study of American characters in Russian literature, however, no character besides the “Worker” is sympathized with as much as “the American Negro.”<sup>104</sup>

Not surprisingly, “the Negro Question” topped almost all other accounts about the United States in its perceived propaganda value: several American works were acceptable mainly for their value in showing the sufferings of African-Americans in the United States. The most famous American novel dealing with racial issues and one of the most widely distributed books in the Soviet Union on racial relations was Harriet Beecher Stowe’s *Uncle Tom’s Cabin*. Stowe was the ninth most popular American author in the Soviet Union during its first forty years.<sup>105</sup> Throughout Soviet times, *Uncle Tom’s Cabin* was read in schools and was widely available to the Soviet public. Serving as a testimony to the way American slave owners treated their slaves, it reflected the Soviet stance on “the Negro Question.” Comfortable discussing and pondering the situation of “Negroes” in the United States, Soviet authorities repeatedly pointed to blatant racism found in American society. It was easy to

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<sup>103</sup>Ruggles, “American Books in Soviet Publishing,” 431-32.

<sup>104</sup>Kiparsky, *English and American Characters in Russian Fiction*, 194-95.

<sup>105</sup>Ruggles, “American Books in Soviet Publishing,” 426.

make propagandistic use of a novel with recognizable characters; references to the novel were often found in cartoons.

Supporting and advancing the cause of minorities was part of the global agenda of the Soviet Union and of its stance on colonialism. The only scholar who has studied Soviet use of “the Negro Question,” Allison Blakely, has stated that the “conceptualization of the problem was on an international scale from the outset, although before the emergence of numerous black African liberation movements, attention centered mainly on the Negro in the United States.”<sup>106</sup> The Soviet side, via the Comintern, relied on the American Communist Party (CPUSA) to provide the theoretical framework for how to represent African Americans. Furthermore, when civil rights groups in the United States started framing their campaigns in terms of defending an “oppressed nation” and advocating for self-determination of African Americans, Soviet authorities made self-determination of African-Americans, and black people everywhere, their official policy.<sup>107</sup>

One of the most influential and popular African-Americans in the Soviet Union was Paul Robeson, singer, actor, and activist. Emphasizing the similarity of Russian and Negro backgrounds—“they were both serfs”—Paul Robeson remained a true friend of the Soviet Union throughout his lifetime. During the 1930s, Robeson lived in London but traveled frequently to the Soviet Union, where his son went to public school. Because of the pending war, they moved back to the U.S. in 1938, but Robeson resumed his travels after the conflict. Following the 1949 Paris World Peace Conference, a propaganda initiative of the Soviet

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<sup>106</sup>Allison Blakely, *Russia and the Negro: Blacks in Russian History and Thought* (Washington, DC: Howard University Press, 1986), 105.

<sup>107</sup>Blakely, *Russia and the Negro*, 110.

Communist Party where Robeson vocally expressed his views of the treatment of African-Americans at home, he turned into somewhat of an outcast in the United States. He was not allowed to perform, and his passport was confiscated.<sup>108</sup> During this time, however, he worked diligently with the National Council for American-Soviet Friendship in the United States and mingled with Soviet delegations to the U.S.

During the late 1940s, when contact with foreigners was rare, Soviet propaganda authorities relied on their American friends to write about the Soviet Union for Americans and to relate stories of the wonderful things they saw in the country.<sup>109</sup> Propaganda authorities likewise counted on “correct” firsthand experiences of Soviet visitors to the USA, making plans to publish collections such as *Progressive Americans Against the Wagers of War: The Second America* following the 1949 Congress of Science and Culture in the United States.<sup>110</sup> As with Soviet works, however, some American books were published in abridged form so that their text would fit Soviet purposes better. Such was the case with Lee Fryer’s *The American Farmer*, a harsh critique of the working conditions American farmers faced in the postwar period. In 1948, the book was published but twenty-two pages were cut, because “a few parts contain praise for the evolution of American farming.”<sup>111</sup>

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<sup>108</sup>For more on Paul Robeson’s and W. E. B. DuBois’s outspoken criticism of American racial problems, see Mary L. Dudziak, “Josephine Baker, Racial Protest, and the Cold War,” *Journal of American History* 81, no. 2 (1994): 546.

<sup>109</sup>Interestingly, when the US State Department and the Library of Congress requested Soviet journals in 1952, the Soviet Ministry of Foreign Trade decided that it was not urgent to answer such requests. RGASPI, f. 17, op. 132, d. 561, l. 57.

<sup>110</sup>RGASPI, f. 17, op. 132, d. 224, l. 55.

<sup>111</sup>RGASPI, f. 17, op. 132, d. 22, ll. 9-11. See also Lee Fryer, *The American Farmer: His Problems & His Prospects* (New York and London: Harper & Brothers, 1947).

Despite Soviet antagonism toward the United States during the early Cold War period, anti-Americanism should in no way be taken as a specifically Soviet thing. Similar views of the United States were found all over the world in the 1940s and the 1950s, and even earlier,<sup>112</sup> although it has been claimed that “contemporary anti-Americanism . . . was born in the aftermath of the Second World War.”<sup>113</sup> Debating American social and racial problems was also in vogue in the United States in the 1950s and 1960s, as American intellectuals echoed many of the arguments made in the USSR about corruption and inequality in the U.S.<sup>114</sup> Soviet authorities offered books written by Americans as legitimate information about America. Stories of slavery, racial discrimination, beatings, lynchings, suppression, and the like were used to represent the struggle against the tycoons and the aggressive American government. By showing parallels between Russian serfdom and American slavery by highlighting the situation and the oppression of African-Americans in the postwar period, the Soviet Union aimed to present its own progressive ideas about modernity while drawing out the worst aspects of the United States of America. They used the books authored by Americans to give their own propaganda a stronger voice and thus handpicked those authors and books they deemed acceptable.

### **Soviet Anti-Americanism in Context**

It is important to acknowledge that although Soviet propaganda authorities often crudely represented the United States, they focused on real problems and issues in the United States.

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<sup>112</sup>For an overview of the origins of the term anti-Americanism see Alan L. McPherson, *Yankee No! Anti-Americanism in U.S.-Latin American Relations* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2003).

<sup>113</sup>Hollander, *Understanding Anti-Americanism*, 240.

<sup>114</sup>*Ibid.*, 241.

Penny M. von Eschen has rightly reminded us that “historians often mute fundamental conflicts within the United States, suggesting a shared, core adherence to material abundance that ultimately transcended differences” when in reality, “oppositional elements” in America—especially “those in African-American culture”—often hold the highest appeal to groups in foreign countries.<sup>115</sup> In advocating anti-Americanism, the Soviet government certainly manipulated these “oppositional elements” to fit its one-dimensional story of American society and political goals but, as Vladimir Shlapentokh has argued, the Soviet image of America was “changeable” while still highly dependent on domestic political developments.<sup>116</sup>

It was, however, not always easy to promote Soviet anti-Americanism. The presence of American tractors and cars in the Soviet Union suggested prosperity and possibilities in the United States. So much so that, in the postwar period, Soviet authorities did not really know how to deal with remnants of American technology in their country. In 1947, when writer John Steinbeck and photographer Robert Capa visited a “famous Stalingrad tractor factory” they noted that “practically all the machinery was made in America, and we were told that the assembly line and the assembly method had been laid out by American engineers and technicians.”<sup>117</sup> The Soviet guides forbade Capa to take pictures of the factory. The fact that the factory was American was too sensitive in 1947, when reconstruction was a major

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<sup>115</sup>Penny M. von Eschen, “‘Satchmo Blows Up the World’: Jazz, Race, and Empire During the Cold War,” in Reinhold Wagnleitner and Elaine Tyler May, *Here, There, and Everywhere: The Foreign Politics of American Popular Culture* (Hanover, NH: University Press of New England, 2000), 164.

<sup>116</sup>Shlapentokh, “The Changeable Soviet Image of America,” 157-59.

<sup>117</sup>John Steinbeck, *A Russian Journal* (New York: Penguin Books, 1999), 121-23.

patriotic project and acknowledging openly that the U.S. had any part in it was out of the question.

In Stalin's time, all media were mobilized in the campaign to help people reach correct conclusions about the United States. Besides the print media, the most important channels for spreading the message were literature, plays, and various monographs and propaganda brochures that harped on American imperialism, racism, corruption, etc. While based on real conditions in America, Soviet anti-American propaganda was often grossly exaggerated and represented in a crude and misleading way. In order to advance a believable image of the United States, Soviet authorities thus cleverly invented a dual image of the good and the bad America. The official "second America" was receptive to progressive values but was unfortunately repressed by an aggressive government and greedy industrialists, advocating for and maintaining the Cold War.

There is certainly a tradition of anti-Westernism throughout Russian history, but the anti-American, anti-Western elements took on a new form and intensity in the postwar period.<sup>118</sup> This can be explained by fear, uncertainty, and paranoia at the highest level—the way that Stalin ruled in the postwar years did not allow for divergence from his plans, and therefore propaganda authorities at the Central Committee maintained an atmosphere that cultivated fear. Anyone involved with the written word or the visual arts had to demonstrate his or her dedication to the state. In the postwar years, Soviet patriotism could not coexist with any form of sympathy for the West.

The polemics of the anti-American campaign were not only tied to high-level debates about how to best represent "the second America" in Soviet theaters and available literature.

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<sup>118</sup>Struve, "Anti-Westernism in Recent Soviet Literature," xx.

Related to the anti-American campaign was Soviet authorities' intolerance for positive views about the United States, let alone relations with Americans. In the postwar period, the state added positive views of America to its list of what constituted counterrevolutionary behavior in the Soviet Union. Liuba was only one of many people who suffered the harshest consequences of the anti-American campaign in the Soviet Union: legal prosecution and imprisonment. What Liuba and other victims of the anti-American campaign left behind, however, is evidence that a counter-myth of America existed within the Soviet Union that opposed the official myth and expressed people's distaste for official Soviet propaganda.



## Chapter 2

### Experiencing the Myth of America, 1943-56

Despite the Cold War and the official anti-American campaign, some Soviet citizens favorably compared the United States with the Soviet Union. The hardships people encountered in real life led some Soviet citizens to create an alternative reality, a myth that in many ways countered the Soviet anti-American one. The Soviet press of the postwar years, for example, spoke endlessly of sacrifices and reconstruction but never mentioned the famine of 1946-47, the growing number of orphans, or other social catastrophes that people faced.<sup>1</sup> Insofar as the coverage of Soviet domestic topics was often so far-removed from everyday realities, why should people trust coverage of international issues or a leading adversary like America any better? America was present in the official discourse, admittedly as an enemy of the Soviet state, but even that kind of coverage aroused curiosity in some Soviet citizens and did not kill the interest others had in American society, culture, and values.<sup>2</sup>

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<sup>1</sup>Elena Zubkova, *Poslevoennoe sovetskoe obshchestvo: Politika i povsednevnost', 1945-1953* (Moscow: Rosslen, 1999). See also Sheila Fitzpatrick, "Postwar Soviet Society: The 'Return to Normalcy', 1945-1953," in *The Impact of World War II on the Soviet Union*, ed. Susan J. Linz (Rowman and Allanheld: Totowa, New Jersey, 1985): 129-56. For a document collection on social catastrophes of the postwar era, see Andrea Graziosi and Oleg Khlevniuk, eds., *Sovetskaia zhizn', 1945-1953* (Moscow: Rosslen, 2003).

<sup>2</sup>Pierre Bourdieu's definition of the "habitus" applies here. He defines the "habitus, as a socially constituted system of cognitive and motivating structures" that "produces practices which tend to reproduce the regularities immanent in the objective conditions of the production of their generative principle." Pierre Bourdieu, *Outline of a Theory of Practice*, trans. by Richard Nice (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1977), 76 and 78.

This chapter relies on the body of sources I collected in the procuracy archives to identify a positive counter-myth about the United States of America in the Soviet Union. The archives of the procuracy store thousands of records that detail the cases of people convicted for anti-Soviet behavior. Most of these files were assembled in the 1950s, after the rehabilitation process had started, and constitute review files (*nadzornoe proizvodstvo*) of a process put in motion when a person who had been convicted of anti-Soviet crimes, or a family member of a convict, applied to have him or her rehabilitated. Each review file provides extracts of documents from the original criminal file in addition to appeals and letters from the accused and family members. In choosing which files to look at, I used two different sets of databases. For the years 1941-53, I had access to an unpublished computer database, and for 1953-59 I used a published catalogue to select cases which mentioned the United States of America.<sup>3</sup> To give an idea of how frequently positive views of America were cited as cause for imprisonment in the Soviet Union, a keyword search for the word “Amerika” estimated that out of 30,094 catalogued files for the earlier period, 7,422 files include a direct reference to the United States.<sup>4</sup> The published catalogue, however, has barely 200 entries for America, thirty for Truman, and sixty for Eisenhower. Most of these references were from 1953-58: political persecution fell dramatically after 1959, and it seems that the authorities were less concerned about positive references to America during the

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<sup>3</sup>V. A. Kozlov and S. V. Mironenko, *58.10: nadzornye proizvodstva prokuratury SSSR po delam ob antisovetskoi agitatsii i propagande. Annotirovannyi katalog, mart, 1953-1991* (Moscow: Mezhdunarodnyi fond “Demokratiia,” 1999). I am very grateful for Vladimir Kozlov for allowing me to use the unpublished computer database in GARF.

<sup>4</sup>A large majority of the files I saw were from the late 1940s or early 1950s, I saw few references to America for the years 1941-46. The number of files can only be an indicator of how many people expressed themselves favorably of America. Often, people made a reference only to Studebaker cars or a US president, for example, and those files would not necessarily appear in a keyword search for America.

Khrushchev thaw.<sup>5</sup> The published catalogue probably includes about 10,000 cases; in 1957-58, 2,955 individuals and 531 groups were convicted for anti-Soviet behavior, after which there is a significant decrease in anti-Soviet prosecutions.

In analyzing over two hundred personal files of Soviet citizens who had been convicted for anti-Soviet behavior in the late 1940s and 1950s, I have identified five major themes relating to the United States of America and the West. The cases I present here are all representative of those themes. The first theme concerns the superior military strength of the United States, America's superpower status, and leadership on the global level. Within this theme one also finds repeated references to international events of the era: World War II, the creation of the state of Israel (1948), the Korean War (1950-53), and the Soviet invasion of Hungary (1956), to name a few. A second theme spotlights technology, progress, and the difficult living standards of Soviet workers and peasants as compared to their American counterparts. A third theme relates to people's positive appraisal of American democracy, the electoral process, freedom of speech, and individual choice. Closely connected to the third theme is the popular topic of the cult of the leader turned inside out. While maligning Soviet leaders, people praised Harry S. Truman and Dwight D. Eisenhower, often manipulating Soviet slogans to praise the American adversary. The final theme, which evolves around alternative (i.e., non-Soviet) sources of information, mainly the radio broadcasts of the Voice of America and other "voices," and published propaganda journals such as *Amerika*, is discussed as part of Soviet reactions to American official propaganda in chapters 3 and 4.

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<sup>5</sup>References to America are rare in cases after 1960.

This chapter examines how the official anti-American myth, and to some extent alternative sources of information, nourished and helped create a counter-myth of “Amerika.” I give examples of the main themes identified and explore the extent to which people used favorable comments about America to express frustrations with their own realities and the meaning of Soviet socialism. In analyzing the sources, I differentiate between the Soviet public representation of reality and private perceptions of that same reality.<sup>6</sup> I argue that, during the anti-American campaign, a counter-myth took shape among part of the Soviet populace in the form of a favorable discourse about the United States of America. Furthermore, this counter-myth existed often because of—and partly in spite of—the official anti-American propaganda of the Soviet government.

### **The Anti-Soviet Soviet Union: Standards for Behavior and the Alternative Myth**

**Q**uestion: How many times can you tell a good joke in the Soviet Union?

**A**nswer: Three times. Once to a friend, once to a police investigator—and once to your cell-mate.

*A Popular Soviet Joke*<sup>7</sup>

The Soviet public harbored many ideas of America that, while seeming to contradict to the official discourse, can also be seen as originating with the official anti-American myth.

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<sup>6</sup>A guiding theoretical framework for a study of rhetoric and presentation through language in Russian history is Donald J. Raleigh, “Languages of Power: How the Saratov Bolsheviks Imagined Their Enemies,” *Slavic Review* 57, no. 2 (1998): 320-49. See also Orlando Figes and Boris Kolonitskii, *Interpreting the Russian Revolution: The Language and Symbols of 1917* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1999); See Lynn Hunt, ed., *The New Cultural History* (Berkeley: The University of California Press, 1989), 17.

<sup>7</sup>*Anti-Soviet Jokes* retrieved from [www.balticsww.com/soviet\\_communist\\_humor\\_jokes.htm](http://www.balticsww.com/soviet_communist_humor_jokes.htm) (last consulted February 10, 2005).

Soviet people were interested in the world around them as well as in their own survival and quality of life—with the dawning of the Cold War and the war of words it ignited, it was justifiable to link external circumstances to private interests. People clearly acted on this when they, sometimes in disbelief, discussed Soviet propaganda about an impending American and English attack on the Soviet Union. It was not, however, acceptable for Soviet citizens to publicly voice their positive opinion of the United States; the authorities had a strict system in place to control the behavior of these people.

The state had clear expectations for individual behavior as it set out to create the new Soviet man. The state punished deviations from those standards according to the Soviet Criminal Code, particularly its article 58, which broadly defined anti-Soviet behavior. Article 58 served as the foundation for the political terror that reigned in the Soviet Union; it defined anti-Soviet behavior and laid out minimal punishment. The article consisted of fourteen clauses that dealt with people considered dangerous to society, i.e., counterrevolutionary or anti-Soviet, but clause ten (58-10) specifically addressed the manifestation and the spread of anti-Soviet agitation: “Propaganda or agitation, containing a call for the overthrow, subversion, or weakening of Soviet authority or for the carrying out of other counterrevolutionary crimes, and likewise the distribution or preparation or keeping of literature of this nature shall be punishable by deprivation of liberty for a term not less than six months.”<sup>8</sup>

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<sup>8</sup>See for example Hugo S. Cunningham’s English translation, “Article 58, Criminal Code of the RSFSR (1934),” retrieved from <http://www.cyberussr.com/rus/uk58-e.html> (last consulted January 30, 2005).

Anti-Soviet behavior thus corresponded with the violation of what sociologist Vladimir Shlapentokh defines as the “official Soviet standards for behavior.”<sup>9</sup> These standards for behavior of “the ideal Soviet individual” applied to the economic, political, international, and private spheres. The state, for example, expected the Soviet man to be “patriotic, ready to defend the motherland, politically vigilant, proud of achieving the first socialist society, capable of evaluating social phenomena from a class point of view, able to demonstrate solidarity with those who struggle against imperialism, and quick to defend the ideas of socialism.” Furthermore, Soviet man was supposed to “reject everything that contradicts the socialist style of life and the persistent struggle for communist ideals.”<sup>10</sup> In other words, agreeing with the American way of life was not acceptable behavior in the Soviet Union. Those caught deviating from the set standards were sometimes prosecuted for anti-Soviet behavior. Thereby, in line with the super patriotism that was the order of the day, complete loyalty to the socialist system was demanded of all.<sup>11</sup> Those who offended the socialist regime, what it stood for, and its present policies were considered anti-Soviet.

An important element of official Soviet propaganda was the promise of what can be seen as the most tenacious myth of Soviet times—the socialist utopia. Without the active use of such myths, argues A.M. Beda, the political culture of the Soviet Union would not have survived, for the strategic use of myths allowed mass political consciousness to be

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<sup>9</sup>Vladimir Shlapentokh, *Public and Private Life of the Soviet People: Changing Values in Post-Stalin Russia* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1989), 18.

<sup>10</sup>*Ibid.*, 19.

<sup>11</sup>See for example, Ralph Parker, *Moscow Correspondent* (London: Frederick Muller Ltd, 1949). Parker, a contemporary observer, described Soviet patriotism as “the most characteristic feature of the contemporary Soviet man” (185).

manipulated to the extent that it was.<sup>12</sup> In order to keep track of how Soviet the Soviet man was, the state employed a complicated network of surveillance, in which it relied upon the collective to monitor the population. By setting the standards of behavior as well as dictating the appropriate view of the world, the state decided what constituted an anti-Soviet crime. State organs conducted the investigation, and, if necessary, prosecuted and convicted the offender.<sup>13</sup>

One such state organ, the Soviet procuracy, the main prosecutorial agency in the Soviet judicial system, provided the sources for the study that follows. The procuracy investigated and prosecuted certain categories of serious crime, represented the state in civil cases, and supervised the investigative branches of the police and the KGB.<sup>14</sup> During the period in question, the procuracy conducted most criminal investigations in the USSR, including investigations of “anti-Soviet slander,” and oversaw the rehabilitation process, started by Khrushchev in 1954.<sup>15</sup>

Never entirely arbitrary, the categories of surveillance were often calculated to fit the propaganda agenda of the day.<sup>16</sup> Those accused of anti-Soviet behavior often fit into one of

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<sup>12</sup>A. M. Beda, *Sovetskaia politicheskaia kul'tura cherez prizmu MVD: Ot “moskovskogo patriotizma” k idee “Bol'shogo Otechestva” (1946-1958)* (Moscow: Izdatel'stvo ob''edineniia Mosgorarkhiv, 2002), 198. Vladimir Shlapentokh also contends that the meaning of political behavior can only be evaluated on a mythological level.

<sup>13</sup>Shlapentokh, in his *Public and Private Life*, 12, uses a similar formulation for criminal activities within the family.

<sup>14</sup>Louise I. Shelley, *Policing Soviet Society: The Evolution of State Control* (London and New York: Routledge, 1996), 70.

<sup>15</sup>*Ibid.*, 71.

<sup>16</sup>Hannah Arendt, in her analysis of totalitarianism, rightfully pointed this out. See, *The Origins of Totalitarianism* (New York: Harcourt, Brace and Company, 1951), 402.

the targeted categories of surveillance—those deemed to be the antipode of the Soviet man at any given point in time were therefore more likely to be kept under surveillance.

Consequently, it should come as no surprise that, given the emphasis on anti-American and anti-Western propaganda in the post World-War-II period, hundreds of people convicted for anti-Soviet behavior were accused of having expressed their fascination with the United States of America or the West in general.

### **Fear of a Renewed War: From World War to Cold War**

**R**oosevelt and Stalin met, and F.D.R. boasted that he was so popular in America that a book of jokes about him had been published.

Stalin replied: 'That's nothing—I have 10 camps full.'  
*A Popular Soviet Joke*<sup>17</sup>

Although the Soviet government had softened the official propaganda against the United States during the war, the Soviet state did not lessen its patriotic expectations of its citizens. Any criticism of the performance of or doubt about the strength of the Red Army qualified as counterrevolutionary behavior, and, in the Soviet judiciary system, this was treated somewhat like treason. In 1943, a female medical doctor who had served in the White Army during the Civil War, a nun of gentry origins, was arrested for anti-Soviet behavior. Her class origins were only barely mentioned in the proceedings<sup>18</sup>—her gossiping about the poor performance

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<sup>17</sup>*Fun People Archive*, retrieved from [http://www.langston.com/Fun\\_People/1994/1994ARV.html](http://www.langston.com/Fun_People/1994/1994ARV.html) (last consulted February 9, 2005).

<sup>18</sup>Clearly this person fit many anti-Soviet categories and would obviously have been a surveillance target. For a recent analysis of the tensions inherent in the operation of Soviet control, see Cynthia Hooper, "Terror



of the Red Army during the Second World War was emphasized. In fact, in 1941, this woman had predicted a crushing defeat in the war, the end of Soviet power, and the subsequent escape of the Soviet leadership to America, which would “leave the nation at the mercy of fate.”<sup>19</sup>

One of the most serious anti-Soviet crimes committed during the war was talk of defeat such as that expressed by this doctor.<sup>20</sup> Not surprisingly, the authorities often encountered such unpatriotic views in the borderlands or in formerly occupied areas. Communist Party cells reported to the Central Committee about the mood of people and worried, for example, about Polish nationalists, who sincerely hoped for the departure of Soviet troops after the war and for the help of England and the USA in attacking the Soviets in order to seize back Polish territories.<sup>21</sup> These kinds of nationalist views lasted long after the war had ended for, as often happens, repressed nations show empathy with the freedom fights of others. Such was the case of a Ukrainian arrested in 1957 at the main train station in Odessa who had made claims about the illegitimacy of the 1956 Soviet invasion of Hungary and

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From Within: Participation and Coercion in Soviet Power, 1924-1964” (Ph.D. diss., Princeton University, 2003).

<sup>19</sup>GARF, f. 8131, op. 31, d. 14162, ll. 1, 1ob. In 1957 when this woman appealed for rehabilitation, her appeal was declined. See *ibid.*, l. 37: “Your guilt was confirmed by a number of witnesses and other materials in your file.”

<sup>20</sup>See for example GARF, f. 8131, op. 31, d. 12854, ll. 1-4 and the emphasis on defeatist moods or *ibid.*, d. 12917, l. 2, where “nice treatment of German occupants among the village population” is a main crime.

<sup>21</sup>Rossiiskii gosudarstvennyi arkhiv sotsial'no-politicheskoi istorii, hereafter RGASPI, f. 17, op. 125, d. 311, ll. 1-8.

simultaneously stated his hopes for the arrival of Americans in order to liberate Ukraine. He himself would then assist the Americans in hanging the Communists.<sup>22</sup>

Criticizing Soviet military strength after the war became another major offense, for example, maintaining that, without the involvement of the United States, the Soviet Union would have lost World War II. These sorts of claims were probably a byproduct of the persistent rumor of a renewed war that circulated in the Soviet Union after the end of the hostilities. Fears of a new war were expressed at public meetings, while Soviet citizens voiced their opinions about the outcome of this anticipated war. Instead of adhering to the Stalinist paradigm of a military confrontation between Great Britain and the United States of America as they sought to establish themselves on the global stage, however, the “anti-Soviet citizen” feared war between England and America, on the one hand, and the Soviet Union on the other. Furthermore, almost all of these utterances entailed a Soviet defeat: “There will be war and then we will have an American spring.”<sup>23</sup> The fear of a renewed war is well documented. It seems that many people believed that if there were a war between the two superpowers the United States would win: “Germany could not beat the USSR, but if America tried, it would take them one day.”<sup>24</sup>

In line with the state’s anti-American policies, newspaper headlines emphasized the imperialistic aspirations of the United States—the intervention in Greece, actions in Turkey,

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<sup>22</sup>GARF, f. 8131, op. 31, d. 88433, ll. 1a and 3. It is tempting to speculate that the frequent mention of hanging and lynching in people’s remarks about the United States had its roots in anti-American Soviet propaganda that emphasized the segregation and the racial inequalities in the United States. Stories of the Ku Klux Klan were common in the Soviet press, for example.

<sup>23</sup>GARF, f. 8131, op. 36, d. 1052, l. 7.

<sup>24</sup>GARF, f. 8131, op. 31, d. 44809, l. 11.

the Truman Doctrine in general, the nature of the Marshall Plan in Europe, and assistance in Latin America, to name a few.<sup>25</sup> One global issue, the Korean War, attracted much attention among those fascinated with America in the early 1950s. One man claimed that it was “rubbish” that America was conducting a bacteriological war in Korea: “America is a civilized country, if they would have liked to they could have crushed Korea a long time ago, they want to wage war [fairly].”<sup>26</sup> Many people took the issue of bacteriological warfare with some skepticism—one man claimed that Soviet papers wrote about “infected flies” in a way that “does not resemble reality.” This particular man claimed in March 1952 that “Soviet papers write lies about Americans dropping infected flies—Soviet propaganda does this in order to create hatred among the Soviet people toward Americans.”<sup>27</sup>

In all official discussions of international affairs, propaganda aimed at showing the American predisposition toward domination and repression, in line with the core characteristics of the capitalist-imperialistic camp, but clearly some people questioned the propaganda and drew their own conclusions about the veracity of the information. The effect of World War II should not be underestimated in this context—the war opened the Soviet Union up to an extent that had not been conceivable during the 1930s. During the war and its immediate aftermath, access to alternative sources of information was easily attained. When the Soviet state closed down again in 1947, it was too late to eliminate altogether the

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<sup>25</sup>N.I. Nikolaeva, “Obraz SShA v Sovetskom obshchestve v poslevoennye gody, 1945-1953,” *Amerikanskii ezhegodnik* (Moscow: Izd-vo Nauka, 2002), 246-47.

<sup>26</sup>GARF, f. 8131, op. 31, d. 38230, l. 7.

<sup>27</sup>GARF, f. 8131, op. 31, d. 40557, l. 8. Another international postwar issue much debated in the Soviet Union was the state of Israel. Soviet Jews were often persecuted for their anti-Soviet (i.e., “nationalistic”) behavior, and often their “crime” involved applauding Israel’s orientation toward America.

influences of wartime openness, and not even the “iron curtain” kept information from seeping into the Soviet Union.

### **Technology and the Well-Off Worker**

The alliance with the United States and the United Kingdom had influenced the outlook of Soviet people, and there are stories of former soldiers who regretted returning to the Soviet Union as they soon realized that the Soviet regime did not share their newfound worldview. One war veteran, who suffered from tuberculosis during the war, was held in captivity from 1942 to 1945, and returned home an invalid, expressed ill will toward the authorities who confiscated his nice American suit upon reentry into the Soviet Union. Instead of wearing it, he had to celebrate May Day in “a dirty sheepskin coat and torn boots.” Oleg Olegovich’s war experience changed his outlook on life: he regretted not staying behind with the Americans and moving to America, as there he would have “lived well and received the title of major in the American army.” Yearning for the American way of life and the military power of America, he claimed that the “Soviet people, who allegedly do not need anything, live much worse than Americans.”<sup>28</sup>

The wartime made it possible for many people to see the West, for others to receive information about the West, and for rumors and hearsay about the West to travel much faster than before. Precisely because of the traumatic effects of the World War on the Soviet people, these new sources of information directed the betrayed hopes that some people felt toward the Soviet power into the creation of an American utopia: a Promised Land where

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<sup>28</sup>GARF, f. 8131, op. 31, d. 41583, l. 28.

people lived in excess and used white bread for fishing bait.<sup>29</sup> The case of a man who had spent the war in Germany supports this notion. Arrested on January 23, 1953, he was accused of having “actively worked against the Soviet Union by spreading slander about Soviet power and against one of the leaders of the CPSU and the Soviet state, and praised the way of life and culture in formerly fascist Germany.” March 1945 found him in the American occupation zone in Germany, where he got to know an American soldier. According to his prosecutor, this man betrayed his motherland by promising the American officer that, upon return to the Soviet Union, he would fight against the hostile realities of the Soviet state. Repatriated in August 1945, he kept his promise to the American: from 1947 to 1953 he spread anti-Soviet agitation, maligned the Communist Party and the Soviet leadership, and slandered Soviet law, as well as Soviet print-media and radiobroadcasts, the living standards of workers in the Soviet Union, and Soviet realities in general. Furthermore, he expressed dissatisfaction with the kolkhoz system in the Soviet Union, while simultaneously praising the life, order, and culture in capitalist countries and in tsarist Russia.<sup>30</sup>

“The material conditions of Soviet workers,”<sup>31</sup> a common cause for complaint, was the flip side of utopian views of the American way of life: “In the USA every unemployed person has a car and lives in many ways better than an engineer in the Soviet Union.”<sup>32</sup>

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<sup>29</sup>Kozlov and Mironenko, 58.10: *nadzornye proizvodstva*, 297. Mark Edele, “A ‘Generation of Victors?’ Soviet Second World War Veterans from Demobilization to Organization, 1941-1956,” (Ph.D. diss.: The University of Chicago, 2004).

<sup>30</sup>GARF, f. 8131, op. 31, d. 43024, ll. 1-2.

<sup>31</sup>For example, GARF, f. 8131, op. 31, d. 12774, l. 7.

<sup>32</sup>GARF, f. 8131, op. 36, d. 1242, l. 4.

Many expressed material complaints similar to this Uzbek—formerly the director of a middle school in Namangan:

In America representatives of the intelligentsia do not walk, they drive in a car. In any case, if they walk anywhere, they attach pedometers to their legs, measuring the length of their walk, and for that they receive pay. The Soviet intelligentsia receives little pay and lives poorly. Because of the lack of products in the Soviet Union, children often get sick, and nothing can be done to cure them.<sup>33</sup>

The theme of the well-off American worker, blessed with superior working conditions that enabled him to produce higher quality products, was widespread. One man noted how the “remarkable” work conditions of Americans contrasted sharply with the abusive Soviet labor camp system. Soviet technology, he said, “is built with slave labor.”<sup>34</sup> Another man described the necessity to learn from Americans in the technological sphere. He specifically named Ford and Studebaker as longer lasting than Soviet cars, stating that Americans were significantly more efficient and produced quality products, while “we have only bad ones.”<sup>35</sup>

### **“The Most Democratic Country in the World”: Soviet Style Democracy and the Cult of the Leader**

**Q**uestion: What is the difference between the Soviet and U.S. constitutions?

**A**nswer: The Soviet constitution guarantees freedom of speech and the right to hold demonstrations. The U.S. constitution also guarantees your freedom *after* the demonstrations and speeches.

*A Popular Soviet Joke*<sup>36</sup>

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<sup>33</sup>GARF, f. 8131, op. 31, d. 48102, l. 118.

<sup>34</sup>GARF, f. 8131, op. 31, d. 38230, l. 7.

<sup>35</sup>GARF, f. 8131, op. 31, d. 39893, l. 5. The presence of American cars from the war, such as Studebakers, could also be a source of alternative information.

<sup>36</sup>*Anti-Soviet Jokes*, retrieved from [www.balticsww.com/soviet\\_communist\\_humor\\_jokes.htm](http://www.balticsww.com/soviet_communist_humor_jokes.htm) (last consulted February 10, 2005).

In the winter of 1951, in a conversation at a synagogue about the Korean War, Vladimir Vladimirovich responded to a claim about America being the most aggressive country in the world: “America is not an aggressive country, quite the opposite; it is the most democratic, strongest country in the world. As to invading smaller countries, that is only what strong and progressive countries do.”<sup>37</sup> In his proceedings, Vladimir Vladimirovich admitted to having said that America was a strong country. But, he claimed, he had “never said that America was stronger than the Soviet Union.”<sup>38</sup> It is, of course, conceivable that with the focus on the Cold War conflict people saw both the United States and the Soviet Union as superpowers. But it is also possible that those who “maligned Soviet power” in the same instance they praised the democratic nature of the United States were in some way disillusioned with Soviet-style democracy and freedom.

In the final stages of war, Igor Igorevich, a Ukrainian Jew and a professional musician, was arrested for having maligned Soviet power and the nondemocratic nature of the Soviet state: “Everyone keeps screaming about democracy, but every fool can see that we do not have authentic democracy, as they do in England and America. Nowhere else is there an NKVD that shuts up its citizens, nowhere else is there such terror—the prerevolutionary police was angelic in comparison with [the NKVD].”<sup>39</sup> When interrogated, Igor Igorevich recounted the anti-Soviet conversation he had had at a friend’s apartment:

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<sup>37</sup>GARF, f. 8131, op. 31, d. 38577, l. 62.

<sup>38</sup>Ibid., l. 82.

<sup>39</sup>GARF, f. 8131, op. 31, d. 14157, l. 1.

I compared democracy in the Soviet Union with democracy in England and the USA. I said that, in some sense, the democracy that exists in England and USA does not exist in the Soviet Union. In England and the USA there is full freedom of speech; any person can say what he likes, when he likes, and where he likes. In the Soviet Union this is forbidden. That is why I said that we do not have democracy here. Genuine democracy exists in England and the United States.<sup>40</sup>

In spite of his claims about the taboo of talking openly in the Soviet Union, Igor Igorevich did not seem to care much about what he said, to whom, or where. One man who testified against him claimed that he had not only heard anti-Soviet views from this individual within the privacy of the home but had also encountered them in talking to him on the street. He had praised the life of workers abroad, expressing his wish of immigrating to the United States where he would live well.<sup>41</sup> Two witnesses observed how, in judging the relations between the USSR and its wartime allies, he had called the Soviet government subordinate to the governments of England and the USA, and said that Soviet authorities followed orders from the former allies.<sup>42</sup>

Another musician, Alexandr Alexandrovich, complained how jazz was outlawed in the Soviet Union after the war. He was infuriated that, because of official ideological prerogatives, all he could play were ditties (*pesenki*). In America, he claimed, jazz was not suppressed and Americans had full freedom. On the other hand, he maintained that the Soviet masses were uncritical and that Soviet “composers do not write from the soul, but do only as they are told.”<sup>43</sup> Both of these musicians were frustrated with the subdued character

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<sup>40</sup>Ibid., l. 15. He had originally been convicted to 5 years in prison.

<sup>41</sup>Ibid.

<sup>42</sup>Ibid., ll. 1-2.

<sup>43</sup>GARF, f. 8131, op. 31, d. 37593, l. 9. This man had listened to the Voice of America. See also *ibid.*, d. 40704, l. 6 for an appraisal of jazz music.



of Soviet society. To accuse the Soviet state of being an underling was an offense, but when it came to standing up for themselves, many people claimed apathy or an apolitical stance not worthy of notice. Igor Igorevich, for example, appealed his case and wrote: “I am a musician and I have never done political work. Political problems do not interest me, but if I expressed some political opinions they reflect a slip or irresponsible thoughtlessness, but by no means do they represent my ideological stance.”<sup>44</sup>

Issues of choice and freedom frequently came up in Soviet people’s discussions of America. One often encounters in the sources laments about how people in the Soviet Union were shepherded around and did not have any choice in life. When talking about elections, people frequently praised the element of choice inherent in the process in the United States. It was not just that Americans could choose from multiple candidates, but also that “there they are not forced to go and vote, like we are here. Here it is obligatory, there it is a choice.”<sup>45</sup> The lack of freedom of the media in the Soviet Union and the fact that there was no outlet to criticize the state caused some outrage:<sup>46</sup> “Here it is forbidden to articulate in the press anything that does not correspond with the politics of the party and the government without being persecuted.”<sup>47</sup> One man bluntly noted that Soviet newspapers published only lies, while the whole nation “suffered hungry in prison.”<sup>48</sup> One man convicted for

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<sup>44</sup>GARF, f. 8131, op. 31, d. 14157, l. 9. He was not rehabilitated and wrote an appeal in 1955. Many people also hid behind drunkenness when defending their anti-Soviet behavior.

<sup>45</sup>GARF, f. 8131, op. 31, d. 38577, l. 86.

<sup>46</sup>GARF, f. 8131, op. 31, d. 40557, l. 67, and d. 40557, l. 55.

<sup>47</sup>GARF, f. 8131, op. 31, d. 91938, l. 21.

<sup>48</sup>GARF, f. 8131, op. 31, d. 46866, l. 24.

distributing anti-Soviet leaflets claimed that he was tired of keeping his thoughts to himself and that he no longer considered himself to be a son of Soviet Russia.<sup>49</sup> There was some sense that in the United States people lived freely, without worrying about invasive authorities: “people there talk a lot, about anything they want.”<sup>50</sup> Thus, the notion that “people mattered”<sup>51</sup> in the United States paved the way for the idea that they did not matter in the Soviet Union: “We do not live here, we only breathe.”<sup>52</sup>

After World War II, the next defining moment in the Soviet Union came on March 5, 1953, when Comrade Stalin passed away. Stories abound of the grief and desperation that many people felt when Stalin died, but mixed with those reactions was a feeling of insecurity among the population. Not only a leader but a father figure and a role model had left the scene. The Stalin cult of the 1930s had been a “means to mobilize the population’s support and build a link between the people and the Party leadership.”<sup>53</sup> Stalin was presented as the “personification of the Soviet system” through whom people could declare their loyalty to the holy trinity: the leader, the party, and the state.<sup>54</sup> Fearing disturbances in the wake of Stalin’s death, the secret police strengthened its campaign against anti-Soviet elements. The atmosphere in the Soviet Union was filled with uncertainty about the immediate future, and

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<sup>49</sup>GARF, f. 8131, op. 31, d. 57224, l. 13.

<sup>50</sup>GARF, f. 8131, op. 31, d. 47825, l. 30.

<sup>51</sup>GARF, f. 8131, op. 31, d. 91938, l. 21.

<sup>52</sup>GARF, f. 8131, op. 31, d. 48282, l. 2.

<sup>53</sup>David L. Hoffmann, *Stalinist Values: The Cultural Norms of Soviet Modernity, 1917-1941* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 2003), 155.

<sup>54</sup>*Ibid.* See also Jeffrey Brooks, *Thank You, Comrade Stalin! Soviet Public Culture From Revolution to Cold War* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 2000).

this both contributed to and enhanced the importance of eliminating socially harmful elements.

On March 6, 1953, after hearing on the radio that Comrade Stalin had died, a thirty-eight-year-old Moldavian, married, and of middle-peasant origins, made the following statement: “The leader of the Soviet government and the Communist Party was not a leader, but a dictator, and this is why he strengthened the military strength of the Soviet Union without setting an example for the educated masses.”<sup>55</sup> He continued by claiming that if the party did not change its policies after the death of its leader, “there will be a breakdown in the proletarian dictatorship.”<sup>56</sup> Finally, he predicted a third world war, anticipating that the Soviet Union would be defeated and a new system would take over—“not American, but something completely new.”<sup>57</sup>

Another man, accused of expressing happiness on March 6 when he heard about the death of the leader, claimed that now was the right time for America to start a war against the Soviet Union and to win an easy victory: “Then he would begin to live.” This Azerbaijani (b. 1920), a veteran of the Great Fatherland War, was unemployed at the time of his arrest on March 16, 1953. Seven witnesses maintained he had demonstrated a hostile attitude toward Soviet power: he repeatedly made anti-Soviet utterances, and maligned the everyday material reality of workers in the USSR and the leadership of the Communist Party and the Soviet

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<sup>55</sup>GARF, f. 8131, op. 31, d. 40557, l. 9. The referral to Stalin’s son could be to either one of his two sons but is probably referring to his elder son, Yakov, who during World War II was taken prisoner by the Germans and died in April 1943 in a German prison. Apparently, Stalin refused to exchange Yakov for a German POW. Dmitri Volkogonov, *Stalin: Triumph and Tragedy*, ed. and trans. Harold Shukman (Rocklin, CA: Forum: An Imprint of Prima Publishing, 1996), 150-51.

<sup>56</sup>GARF, f. 8131, op. 31, d. 40557, l. 9.

<sup>57</sup>GARF, f. 8181, op. 31, d. 40557, l. 7.

state. Simultaneously, he praised the life that workers led in capitalist countries, predicting a war between the USSR and the capitalist countries in which the Soviet Union would be defeated.<sup>58</sup> Two days later, in a conversation with one of the witnesses, he claimed that Stalin's followers would not be strong enough to govern the country and that this would, in the near future, contribute to the fall of the Soviet Union when "the nation would be saved from torture."<sup>59</sup>

Stalin's eventual successor, Nikita Sergeevich Khrushchev, needed time to become the unquestioned leader of the party.<sup>60</sup> Three years after the death of Stalin, Khrushchev denounced him at the Twentieth Party Congress, held in February 1956, the first congress since Stalin's death. In his famous Secret Speech,<sup>61</sup> Khrushchev declared that the Central Committee now "resolutely condemned the cult of the individual as alien to the spirit of Marxism-Leninism."<sup>62</sup> The Cold War historiography of the Khrushchev period has emphasized the initial willingness of the regime to reform itself and overcome the crimes of the Stalin era. What has become clear with the still limited opening of Russian archives, however, is that the beginning of the cultural thaw in the Soviet Union barely influenced the regime's tolerance of alternative political opinion. In fact, postwar political persecution did not end with Stalin. A wave of political persecution in the wake of Stalin's death, and a third

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<sup>58</sup>GARF, f. 8131, op. 31, d. 44809, l. 4.

<sup>59</sup>Ibid., l. 6.

<sup>60</sup>Iurii Aksiutin, "Popular Responses to Khrushchev" in *Nikita Khrushchev*, eds. William Taubman, Sergei Khrushchev, and Abbott Gleason (New Haven, MA: Yale University Press, 2000), 178.

<sup>61</sup>William Taubman, *Khrushchev: The Man and his Era* (New York: W.W. Norton, 2003), 270. The Party Congress was scheduled to end on February 25 and foreign delegates and guests were therefore not present when the Soviet delegates arrived for the unscheduled secret session on February 26.

<sup>62</sup>Ibid., 271.

peak in 1957 and 1958 in the immediate aftermath of Khrushchev's denunciation of Stalin, temporarily impeded the effects of the cultural thaw.

Little research has been done on this phenomenon, and, not surprisingly, the historical memory has tended to brush over the political persecutions of the late 1950s, which never reached the heights of political persecution under Stalin. Remembered as a period of "liberal reform" in the Soviet Union, the late 1950s has only recently come in for revision. In a recent article, Russian historian Elena Papovian shows how a December 1956 decree of the Central Committee called for the intensification of political work and the elimination of anti-Soviet and harmful elements all over the Soviet Union.<sup>63</sup> This campaign followed a thaw between 1953 and 1956, where the authorities sought to minimize repression, releasing large numbers of prisoners from the Gulag.<sup>64</sup> Interestingly, Papovian shows how the intensification of the anti-Soviet campaign in the late 1950s also marked the beginning of the transferring of the education role of the state to the population—in 1959, the state dramatically reduced political persecutions,<sup>65</sup> but instead called upon the Soviet people to take responsibility for themselves—and others.<sup>66</sup>

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<sup>63</sup>Elena Papovian, "Primenenie stat'i 58-10 UK RSFSR v 1957-1958 gg. Po materialam Verkhovnogo suda SSSR i Prokuratury SSSR v GARF" in *Korni travy: Sbornik statei molodykh istorikov*, eds. I.S. Epechinaia and E.V. Shemkova (Moscow: Memorial', 1996): 73-87. Here p. 73.

<sup>64</sup>In April 1953, 2,466,914 people inhabited the Gulag but by January 1956, the number had fallen to 781,630 people. Cited in Miriam Jane Dobson, "Re-fashioning the Enemy: Popular Beliefs and the Rhetoric of Destalinisation, 1953-1964" (Ph.D. diss: University College London, 2003), 83.

<sup>65</sup>Papovian, "Primenenie stat'i 58-10," 83; Dobson, "Refashioning the Enemy," 85.

<sup>66</sup>Dobson, "Re-fashioning the Enemy," 91.

The 1956 Soviet invasion of Hungary sparked people's strong reactions. Some Soviet citizens voiced dreams of overthrowing the regime. For instance, a group of eighteen-year-old students in Kyrgyzstan tried to mobilize their fellow students:

Comrade Students! (do not be frustrated). Let us organize an insurrection like the one in Hungary. We will win the big kids over to our side; students of various cities in the USA, England, and France will help us. Our stipend was illegally taken away. Anyone who wants to participate come to the square tomorrow at 12 noon. Do not think that this will be risky. No! It is the honest truth. Do not tell any of the teachers.<sup>67</sup>

Many people got their information about the events in Hungary through foreign radio broadcasts, as did a young student in Byelorussia, who had listened to "anti-Soviet radio broadcasts from London at the time of the events in Hungary."<sup>68</sup> He had also called out: "Comrades, slaughter as many Communists as you can, so that soon there will be none. There will be America, and we will be with her."<sup>69</sup> Pleas to America and to President Eisenhower were common, as the outcries from a forty-two-year-old Russian peasant who "threatened" the leaders of the party and government show. He offered to "personally kill them all and leave for America." He had apparently come to Moscow in order to fulfill these actions and had "fifteen thousand people behind him" who would fulfill his mission if he failed. He ended by stating that "soon Eisenhower will come and put things in order."<sup>70</sup>

A Gulag inmate also held Eisenhower in high esteem, claiming that "soon the Americans will take our side and destroy the Communists. Soon Eisenhower will be our father. We will

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<sup>67</sup>GARF, f. 8131, op. 31, d. 77481, l. 3.

<sup>68</sup>GARF, f. 8131, op. 31, d. 83258, ll. 1-2.

<sup>69</sup>GARF, f. 8131, op. 31, d. 83258, l. 3.

<sup>70</sup>GARF, f. 8131, op. 31, d. 82753, l. 7.

be surrounded on all sides, and then all Communists will be kaput. I will personally hang all the Communists, and the people will destroy them.”<sup>71</sup> In complaining about his felt boots, he said, “if these felt boots were on display in America, people would run a kilometer to get away from them. In America they also have felt boots, but only sixteen people in the Soviet Union have felt boots like the Americans do: the people in the Kremlin.”<sup>72</sup>

Many people articulated contempt for the Soviet leadership and often used the propaganda slogans of the regime in expressing themselves. Surely, the Soviet people were well versed in propaganda slogans of the regime, as parades and celebrations of leaders were embedded in the socialist value system. But imagine the dismay when a Soviet citizen cried out that “Truman is the only one capable of providing us with freedom!”<sup>73</sup> The cult of the leader was thus often turned inside out, as, for example, when a group of drunks shouted so that many people heard them:

Long live Capitalism!  
Down with Communism!  
Down with Soviet power and down with Communism!  
Long live Eisenhower!<sup>74</sup>

Another common way to grumble about the regime was to tell jokes. Throughout the Soviet experience, its leaders were popular subjects of anti-Soviet political anecdotes:

At the 20th Party Congress as Khrushchev recounted the evils perpetrated by Stalin, a voice came from the hall: ‘And where were you then?’ ‘Would the man who asked that

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<sup>71</sup>GARF, f. 8131, op. 31, d. 84264, l. 28.

<sup>72</sup>Ibid.

<sup>73</sup>GARF, f. 8131, op. 31, d. 43336, l. 11.

<sup>74</sup>GARF, f. 8131, op. 31, d. 83367, l. 8.

question stand up,’ said Khrushchev. The questioner took fright and did not stand. ‘That’s where we were, too!’ replied Khrushchev.<sup>75</sup>

Seth Graham, in a study of the Russo-Soviet anecdote, asserts that the political joke was an ingrained part of a cultural tradition where people used the anti-Soviet joke to express that “the official interpretation of reality was inhuman nonsense.”<sup>76</sup> Graham claims that the political anti-Soviet jokes were “anti-myths.” He emphasizes how the jokes engage state discourse and, as such, stand as parodies of the state’s discourse and are also based on experience and knowledge of state described realities.<sup>77</sup> Historian Iurii Aksiutin reminisces about being a university student during the Khrushchev era and competing to tell “the most scathing political joke.”<sup>78</sup> “An old man from a village says to Khrushchev that it of course would not be bad to catch up with America, but that they should definitely not pass them. In reply to the natural question, ‘But why?’ he answered, ‘So that they won’t see our naked behinds!’”<sup>79</sup> Telling anti-Soviet jokes was obviously a risk as Ludmilla Alexeyeva writes: “I told that joke to my husband. He told it to his most trusted friends. I told it to one or two of my friends. They, too, told it to their friends. Every one of us risked a ten-year sentence.”<sup>80</sup> Whether it was passing on jokes, talking too loud on the streets, or lamenting to a group of

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<sup>75</sup>Z. Dolgoplova, ed. and trans., *Russia Dies Laughing: Jokes from Soviet Russia* (London: André Deutsch, 1982), 30.

<sup>76</sup>Seth Benedict Graham, “A Cultural Analysis of the Russo-Soviet *Anekdot*” (Ph.D. diss., University of Pittsburgh, 2003), 6.

<sup>77</sup>*Ibid.*, 92-93, 97, and 153.

<sup>78</sup>Aksiutin, “Popular Responses to Khrushchev,” 197.

<sup>79</sup>*Ibid.*, 365 (fn 62).

<sup>80</sup>Ludmila Alexeyeva’s *The Thaw Generation: Coming of Age in the Post-Stalin Era* (Boston: Little Brown, 1990), 39. She continues though, that “[j]okes notwithstanding, we continued to believe that Marxism was the most progressive teaching and that socialism was the bright future of mankind.”



friends, some people had ideas of a different world where concepts such as democracy and freedom were somehow acted out differently in practice. In reality, the “anti-Soviet” person noted that options were limited and social democracy restricted.

## **The Myth of America and Soviet Socialism**

**Q**uestion: What is the shortest joke of all?

**A**nswer: Communism.

*A Popular Soviet Joke*<sup>81</sup>

What did Soviet socialism mean to people who observed and commented on America in a positive way? In his study of the Soviet cultural offensive, Frederick C. Barghoorn rightfully warned against exaggerating the meaning of interest in America:

Interest in American comforts and luxuries should not [...] be interpreted as indication of a lack of pride and patriotism on the part of Soviet people. They are determined to have these luxuries themselves, and some of them may share the Kremlin’s professed confidence that before many decades have passed the Soviet Union will actually outproduce even the United States, at first in heavy industry and possibly, eventually, in the field of consumers’ goods.<sup>82</sup>

The fact that all of the people whose views are presented here had been politically persecuted and sentenced by the state for anti-Soviet behavior complicates this issue. They often may have been targets of persecutions that labeled them anti-Soviet without their having doubted the idea of socialism and the Soviet Union. But they may also have been victims of the Soviet state’s notorious suspicion of all things foreign—including random

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<sup>81</sup>*Soviet Political Jokes* retrieved from [http://www.geocities.com/troys\\_tales/jokes.html](http://www.geocities.com/troys_tales/jokes.html) (last consulted on February 10, 2005).

<sup>82</sup>Frederick C. Barghoorn, *The Soviet Cultural Offensive: The Role of Cultural Diplomacy in Soviet Foreign Policy* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1960), 310.

observations about the nature of life in America. With certain changes in the Soviet system, society would be able to move ahead, maybe even overtake and surpass America. Russian historian Vladimir Kozlov has, for example, recently documented incidents of mass unrest in the Soviet Union, arguing that “the spontaneous uprisings of the 1950s and early 1960s against party bosses who had betrayed the ‘cause of communism’ were, no matter how paradoxical it sounds, evidence of the continued ideological stability of the regime and of the still vibrant belief in ‘real communism.’”<sup>83</sup> Idealizing America did not necessarily mean that people had given up faith in the idea of the Soviet Union; it could, however, mean that people disagreed with the road that the Soviet leadership had taken.

As mentioned previously, there are several accounts of Soviet citizens’ capabilities to judge the outside world, but these accounts most often focus on privileged groups. America, as the incarnation of the imperialistic capitalist bloc, remained an important factor in how the Soviet state defined its domestic and international policies and influenced the worldview of the Soviet people. Some, like satirical writer Vladimir Voinovich, would even argue that the official representation of America fomented the alternative view of America as the Promised Land:

Every day Soviet newspapers, radio and television broadcasts curse the United States of America. They paint a bleak picture of the unemployed, racial discrimination, crime, devaluation, and impoverishment. But precisely because of such propaganda, an enormous number of Soviet people believes that there are no such serious problems in America. They think that money there grows on trees and that one can, without doing anything, live luxuriously, gamble in a casino, and drive around in Cadillacs.<sup>84</sup>

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<sup>83</sup>Vladimir A. Kozlov, *Mass-Uprisings in the USSR: Protest and Rebellion in the Post-Stalin Years*, trans. and ed. Elaine McClarnand MacKinnon (Armonk, NY: M.E. Sharpe, 2002), 314.

<sup>84</sup>Vladimir Voinovich’s *Antisovetskii Sovetskii Soiuz: Dokumental’naia fantastagoriia v 4-kh chastiakh* (Moscow: Izdatel’stvo “Materik”, 2002), 37.

Similarly, émigré Anisimov described how a defector had told him “that most Soviet soldiers scoffed at Communist propaganda, contending that the ‘hate-America’ campaign had been a complete failure.”<sup>85</sup> He continued:

Most Soviet people with whom I have had opportunity to talk about the United States thought that life was freer, pleasanter, more prosperous, in general ‘better’ in the U.S.A. than in Russia. Most of them held the view that the American government interferes less in the private pursuits of its citizens than does the Soviet government, and that it is more efficient and less oppressive.<sup>86</sup>

Such observations, according to Anisimov, caused many Soviet people to critically evaluate their government and what it had to offer:

[I]t is often the case that Soviet people, instead of assuming that the governments of Western countries are as dishonest as their own, try to escape the frustrating experience of Soviet realities by attributing to non-Communist governments all the ideal qualities of a wish-dream government. I have come across many cases illustrating this tendency to idealize the West.<sup>87</sup>

In addition, several accounts have highlighted a not so hidden underground fascination with the United States and celebrated young people who imitated or adapted American culture. Labeling themselves *shtatniki* or *stiliagi*, these people embraced American popular culture, fashion and music and, through their cultural consumption, believed that they had come closer to the quintessential American values of freedom.<sup>88</sup> The social background of

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<sup>85</sup>Oleg Anisimov, “The Attitude of the Soviet People toward the West,” *Russian Review* 13, no. 2 (1954): 79-80. Interestingly, in 2002 and again in 2003-04, I repeatedly heard from ordinary Russians, academics, and general observers, that the anti-American propaganda had never fully worked in the Soviet Union and people reminisced quite happily about their encounters with American culture and consumer products (cigarettes, soft drinks, clothes, films, novels, etc.). This is an interesting observation—the America of the Cold War still upheld a mythical perception in the anti-American Russia of the twenty-first century.

<sup>86</sup>*Ibid.*, 80.

<sup>87</sup>*Ibid.*, 81.

<sup>88</sup>For a good overview of this literature, see Mark Edele, “Strange Young Men in Stalin’s Moscow: The Birth and Life of the Stiliagi, 1945-1953,” *Jahrbücher für Geschichte Osteuropas* 50, no. 1 (2002): 37-61.

the people whose files I looked at shows that fascination with America was not limited to *stiliagi*. Indeed, the available information on each person indicates that people of diverse backgrounds and various means expressed interest in the United States of America. The cases therefore provide a cross-section of Soviet society; these people had different levels of education, held different occupations ranging from peasant to worker to factory manager, accountant, and artist, and came from all over the Soviet Union. Furthermore, in some cases there are clear examples of some kind of contact with America or the West that gave people their anti-Soviet ideas. The most common experience was fighting or living close to the front in World War II, but later the broadcasts of foreign radio stations, particularly the Voice of America and also the BBC, the Voice of Israel, and Radio Liberty, contributed to people's alternative outlook on life.<sup>89</sup>

It may seem paradoxical that everyday history (bottom up) is often written with official (top down) sources. However, Vladimir Shlapentokh has rightfully pointed out that popular images of the Soviet leadership are often to be found in "the behavior of the authorities toward the people."<sup>90</sup> Official sources sought to create "a reality which must exist in the minds of the people inside and outside the country and which [was] beneficial to the given

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<sup>89</sup>Radio broadcasting, as Maury Lisann has speculated, "may account for more communication between the Communist and non-Communist parts of the world than all forms of private and laboriously negotiated intergovernmental exchanges combined." It is difficult to exaggerate the importance of foreign radio broadcasts to the Soviet Union, but at the same time it is hard to study their contents and direct impact. To this day, practically everyone admits to having listened to the Voice of America, and even though people realized it was Western propaganda, they claim to have known all along from these broadcasts that life was better in America. To what extent they really believed that is debatable, but the broadcasting did contribute to the introspection of state and society. Maury Lisann, *Broadcasting to the Soviet Union: International Politics and Radio* (New York: Praeger Publishers, 1975), v. See also Ludmilla Alexeyeva, *U.S. Broadcasting to the Soviet Union* (New York: U.S. Helsinki Watch Committee, 1986).

<sup>90</sup>Shlapentokh, *Public and Private*, 21.

political regime.”<sup>91</sup> It is impossible to measure the extent of views that went against the official representation of reality and were collected and prosecuted by the state or to generalize about public opinion or popular sedition in the Soviet Union based on these sources. However, in creating and enforcing myths, the Soviet state sought to unify society, and it punished those people who criticized the politicized “Soviet reality.”

As the Soviet government tried to channel the population’s perceptions of the outside world, Soviet agitators collected reports from local party officials, who gauged the popular opinion in conversations and reported on “unhealthy moods” in the Soviet Union. Soviet agitators collected questions at party meetings around the country, compiled them into a summary, and sent them to the Central Committee in Moscow. Commonly known by their Russian name, *svodki*, these summaries of “moods of the population” were one way the Soviet state kept in touch with popular opinion in the country, although the effects of such reports remain difficult to determine.

The official media often influenced the comments made at these meetings, and sometimes the silence of the official media on a topic sparked questions from alert Soviet citizens. This is particularly evident in people’s questions about life in the Soviet Union soon after the war: “Why is there only one political party in the Soviet Union?” “Why has our material position not improved, now that the war is over?”<sup>92</sup> Reconstruction was obviously an important topic as well, and people wondered about everyday things such as when they would get an increased ration of bread, when clothes, shoes, and other industrial products would become more affordable, and whether they would be compensated for unused vacation time from the

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<sup>91</sup>Ibid., 15.

<sup>92</sup>RGASPI, f. 17, op. 125, d. 420, ll. 32-33. This is January 1946.

war.<sup>93</sup> Judging from these comments as well as questions and concern about an impending apocalypse, Soviet people were skeptical of the official discourse about the pace of reconstruction and some even feared that some “outside danger” would soon destroy the Soviet Union.

Soviet agitators were especially worried about Soviet citizen’s favorable interest in the United States. As we have seen, interest in the outside world was high among the Soviet people but, as in the case of anti-Soviet criminal cases, the United States of America was the most common foreign place mentioned in the *svodki*. One can even speculate that Soviet authorities saw questions about the United States as indicative of American propaganda succeeding in reaching the Soviet people. Also, the extent to which people compared Soviet domestic realities to conditions in the United States was certainly frowned upon in Soviet administrative circles, and one can speculate that the expressed interest in the United States, its policies, way of life, and its relationship with the Soviet Union influenced the strong anti-American stance of the Soviet authorities.

In addition to worrying about a renewed war, many Soviet citizens also wondered why there was an increased strain in the relationship between the Soviet Union and the former allies, England and the United States. They even asked if there would be further Lend-Lease from the United States.<sup>94</sup> At one point, soon after the war, there was a rumor about Stalin never returning from vacation and that the Soviet Union would be controlled by the United States.<sup>95</sup> To some, that would not be such a bad thing. They speculated about the living

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<sup>93</sup>RGAPI, f. 17, op. 125, d. 343, l. 97.

<sup>94</sup>RGASPI, f. 17, op. 125, d. 420, ll. 21-24.

<sup>95</sup>RGASPI, f. 17, op. 125, d. 420, ll. 32-33. Here l. 33.

conditions of workers in America: “How do workers in America live?”<sup>96</sup> In 1947, when things had really turned sour between the United States and the Soviet Union, people started questioning whether there was a difference between the Truman Doctrine and the Marshall Plan,<sup>97</sup> as well as wondering what the Marshall Plan, “about which the papers write so much these days,” would actually bring those fortunate enough to receive it.<sup>98</sup>

Questions about America ranged from thinking whether an American attack from Alaska posed a real danger to the Soviet Union<sup>99</sup> to inquiring, “Why is America so strongly interested in our bread?”<sup>100</sup> People also wondered why the American (and English) working class was not actively fighting against their reactionary governments, “which carry on politics that are against the interests of their people.”<sup>101</sup> What measures can we take against England and the United States in relation to their anti-Soviet propaganda?<sup>102</sup> “What do the American people think about the politics of Truman?”<sup>103</sup> “Is it true that the United States would like to resume trade with the Soviet Union?”<sup>104</sup>

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<sup>96</sup>RGASPI, f. 17, op. 125, d. 420, l. 75.

<sup>97</sup>RGASPI, f. 17, op. 125, op. 125, d. 510, ll. 16-19.

<sup>98</sup>RGASPI, f. 17, op. 125, op. 125, d. 510, ll. 20-21.

<sup>99</sup>Ibid.

<sup>100</sup>RGASPI, f. 17, op. 125, op. 125, d. 510, ll. 20-21.

<sup>101</sup>RGASPI, f. 17, op. 125, op. 125, d. 510, l. 23.

<sup>102</sup>RGASPI, f. 17, op. 125, op. 125, d. 510, l. 31.

<sup>103</sup>RGASPI, f. 17, op. 125, op. 125, d. 510, l. 31.

<sup>104</sup>Ibid. See also RGASPI, f. 17, op. 125, d. 515, l. 24.

Soviet citizen's curiosity and queries about both the Soviet Union and the outside world indicate several things. First, it is clear that many people had read anti-American propaganda in the Soviet media but wanted to know more, for example, about the Truman Doctrine and the Marshall Plan. Some clearly believed that living standards in the United States were superior to Soviet standards, and others were skeptical of the Soviet one-party system. People tried to understand the nuances of American policy and how it would affect the Soviet Union and their own lives. Furthermore, they questioned Soviet propaganda about the United States. If everything the Soviet media said about the United States was true, why were American workers not rebelling against the evil powers?

In Stalin's Soviet Union, people were prosecuted and sentenced to prison for admitting to having listened to the Voice of America or having read something like the American propaganda magazine, *Amerika Illustrated*. Soviet authorities were hard pressed to erase favorable sentiments about America from Soviet society, but monitoring and controlling people's perceptions was an especially difficult project since, in the decades leading up to the Second World War, the image of America had been far from homogenous. The authorities, however, tried to control and monitor information in the Soviet Union. It was not enough to introduce anti-American topics into all Soviet media; it was also necessary to fight undesired information from America and make sure that Soviet citizens understood how to "correctly" view the United States.

Therefore, these cases represent the state's unrelenting but unsuccessful efforts at preventing the Soviet citizen from making any independent analysis of the outside world and domestic realities. Shlapentokh argues that throughout the Stalin period, "private



communications on important social and political issues were rare.”<sup>105</sup> The sources suggest that fears that made people avoid such interactions were justified. Whether people had gathered in apartments with friends, chatted with acquaintances on the streets, spoken at public meetings,<sup>106</sup> ranted on public transportation, drunkenly brawled at a train station, or written letters, they could expect, in some way or the other, to be held accountable for their behavior. In some cases, the alternative reality of the “American way of life” helped people deal with everyday life in the Soviet Union: the American “truth” about the Soviet Union corresponded with these people’s experiences in a way that the Soviet official discourse did not.

### Perceptions and Propaganda—Agency and Dissent

On a visit to a collective farm, Khrushchev is chatting paternally with the farmers.

‘So how’s life?’ Nikita Sergeevich jokes.

‘Life’s great!’ the farmers joke back.

*A Popular Soviet Joke*<sup>107</sup>

When looking at the files about anti-Soviet behavior, one quickly becomes well versed in the phraseology of the regime. As the prosecutors’ staff wrote up their reviews of each individual case, people’s “crimes” were frequently reduced simply to “maligning Soviet realities,” or it was written that the accused had “eulogized the capitalist countries.” The

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<sup>105</sup>Shlapentokh, *Public and Private*, 187.

<sup>106</sup>I do not wish to suggest that people’s comments at public meetings led to arrest—for that I have no evidence.

<sup>107</sup>Graham, “A Cultural Analysis of the Russia-Soviet *Anekdot*,” 17 (fn. 24).

frequent mention of “Soviet realities” deserves special consideration, as bureaucrats meant something specific when they used the term. In the period under investigation, an ideal Soviet reality included anti-American propaganda and an emphasis on Soviet patriotism.

Obviously, the Soviet regime had a socialist reality in mind, where everyone conformed to socialist standards of behavior. But ingrained in that reality, as previously discussed, was the surveillance system: Soviet reality was a stage on which everyone was potentially under surveillance. The outbursts and expressions of anti-Soviet behavior examined here were instances in which members of the cast left the script behind and started to improvise. The public stage was everywhere and the private stage was hard to define—making these kinds of improvisation risky. The fact is that, in order to escape persecution, people had to act as if they were on stage all the time before a dangerously critical audience. The material reality of wartime and postwar USSR provided the stage on which these people lived their lives. Life was unspeakably difficult during the war in the Soviet Union, and when the hope for a better life afterward did not measure up to expectations, the gulf between hope and reality created the dissatisfaction that shaped how some people viewed the outside world and Soviet realities.

But how real, then, is the Soviet reality that people praising America and Americans constructed? Clearly, this Soviet reality was real to the people whose remarks were reported to the authorities; the files certainly bear testimony to the mutual surveillance the state imposed on its citizens. However, here one should take into account the power of language and look at ideology and its relationship to the subject and the self in the context of late Stalinism and the early thaw period. This trend in Soviet history, identified as the resistance debate, has for good reasons mostly focused on the period leading up to World War II.

While the resistance debate mostly focuses on issues of confrontation and dissent, it is also of great relevance in this context of creating alternative myths by expressing realities based on available knowledge, experience, or alternative sources of information. This, too, raises the question of Stalinist bureaucratic sources and whether people convicted for anti-Soviet behavior really commented favorably on the United States or if they were framed.

The pathbreaker for all later discussions of the self in Soviet history, Stephen Kotkin, argued that the Soviet people internalized the language of the authorities: a Soviet person managed to survive as a Soviet citizen by learning to “Speak Bolshevik.”<sup>108</sup> Igal Halfin and Jochen Hellbeck, who in their work rely on personal sources such as diaries, further complicate Kotkin’s thesis. They claim that he leaves the Soviet subject “bereft of an ideological agenda of its own”<sup>109</sup> and that, in Kotkin’s analysis, the Soviet citizen is entirely at the mercy of the regime, incapable of any independent analysis of (mainly) domestic affairs. Another historian, Sarah Davies, wrote a controversial but valuable study of “popular opinion” in the 1930s based on mood reports (*svodki*). She criticized Kotkin for taking propaganda “at face value” and not allowing for the ability of Soviet people to actively create alternative realities.<sup>110</sup> Kotkin, in turn, wrote a scathing review of Davies’s book, claiming that she “attributes near universality to the grumbling [the mood summaries] contain.”<sup>111</sup>

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<sup>108</sup>Stephen Kotkin, *Magnetic Mountain: Stalinism as a Civilization* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1995).

<sup>109</sup>Igal Halfin and Jochen Hellbeck, “Rethinking the Stalinist Subject: Stephen Kotkin’s ‘Magnetic Mountain’ and the State of Soviet Historical Studies” *Jahrbücher für Geschichte Osteuropas* 44, no. 3 (1996): 458.

<sup>110</sup>Sarah Davies, *Popular Opinion in Stalin’s Russia: Terror, Propaganda, and Dissent, 1934-1941* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1997), 7.

<sup>111</sup>Stephen Kotkin, review of *Popular Opinion in Stalin’s Russia: Terror, Propaganda, and Dissent, 1934-1941* by Sarah Davies, *Europe-Asia Studies* 50, no. 4 (June 1998): 739-42. Quote p. 740.

Scholars using Stalinist administrative sources have thus been accused of overestimating the sense of popular agency and omitting, ignoring, or underestimating the role of the state while locating popular resistance in Soviet society. Jochen Hellbeck, for example, emphasizes that categories of political apathy reflect the ideological commitment of the Soviet regime, and therefore do not reflect people's mood:<sup>112</sup> official surveillance categories created the kind of views expressed. Lynne Viola, however, suggests that people's views should not be dismissed because, as has been pointed out for the 1930s, popular resistance depended upon the regime for its existence. In a recent study, Juliane Fürst claims that "in the post-war period the acceptance of and belief in Soviet (and at times even Stalinist) values is the precondition for the ability to voice dissent."<sup>113</sup> I agree that the nature of the Soviet state—especially its reliance on propaganda and a didactic approach to its role as an educator of the masses—is observable in anti-Soviet comments about America. If the anti-Soviet statements of citizens are to be seen as "hidden transcripts"<sup>114</sup> of society, it is important to give them real consideration while simultaneously noting that in the Soviet context those transcripts also represent the "ideological assumptions of party leaders."<sup>115</sup>

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<sup>112</sup>Jochen Hellbeck, "Speaking Out; Languages of Affirmation and Dissent in Stalinist Russia," *Kritika: Explorations in Russian and Eurasian History* 1, no. 1 (2000): 73.

<sup>113</sup>Juliane Fürst, "Re-examining Opposition under Stalin: Evidence and Context—A Reply to Kuromiya," *Europe-Asia Studies* 55, no. 5 (2003): 790. See also her "Prisoners of the Soviet Self?—Political Youth Opposition in Late Stalinism" *Europe-Asia Studies* 54, no. 3 (2002): 353-75.

<sup>114</sup>James Scott, *Domination and the Arts of Resistance: Hidden Transcripts* (New Haven and London: Yale University Press, 1990).

<sup>115</sup>Jeffrey W. Jones, "'People Without a Definite Occupation': The Illegal Economy and 'Speculators' in Rostov-on-the-Don, 1943-48," in Donald J. Raleigh, ed. *Provincial Landscapes: Local Dimensions of Soviet Power, 1917-1953* (Pittsburgh: University of Pittsburgh Press, 2001), 239.

Getting at the mindset of people is always a difficult task for historians, and that task becomes even more problematic when dealing with “Soviet reality.” If, for example, people were being framed for pro-American views and these files, therefore, only represent the mindset of Soviet agitators and prosecutors—then someone at the bureaucratic level was creatively and sometimes even correctly imagining an America that was the complete antithesis of the official Soviet party line. Dismissing the meaning of these opinions as purely the workings of the state caters to ideas about the all-encompassing Soviet state—which diminishes Soviet people to walk-ons in the great play staged by the totalitarian theater in the Soviet Union. An all-inclusive definition of Soviet reality, therefore, has to embrace the concept of a police state that monitored its citizens and sought to control them. Seen from the authorities’ perspective, even the slightest criticism of “Soviet reality”—i.e., the state—could be viewed as a sign of dangerous behavior.<sup>116</sup> This is the case in point: the people I study criticized their lack of freedom and power, their desperation and poverty, and the constant threat of harassment and uncertainty in which they lived. They criticized *their* Soviet reality, a reality of control, surveillance, and persecution.

I maintain that an approach that acknowledges that people responded to the Soviet regime in a variety of ways is preferable. The evidence and analysis put forth in this chapter seeks to reconcile the opposing views in showing that people did *both*: they knew how to speak Bolshevik to an extent where they could manipulate the anti-American discourse, but people

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<sup>116</sup>For works on policing, control, and surveillance, I rely heavily on Shelley, *Policing Soviet Society* and Oleg Kharkhordin, *The Collective and the Individual in Russia: A Study of Practices* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1999). For an important discussion of *Kramola* the archaic notion the Soviet state formulated in controlling people’s mindsets, see V. A. Kozlov, “Kramola: Inakomyslie v SSSR vo vremena N. Khrushcheva i L. Brezhneva (Po materialam Verkhovnogo suda i Prokuratury SSSR)” in *Obshchestvennye nauki i sovremennost’* 12, no. 3 (2002): 75-88; and *ibid.*, 12, no. 4 (2002): 68-79.

also adapted the language and the ideology represented by alternative sources of information about America. In some sense, one could emphasize their multilingualism: The Soviet people were not a monolithic, inactive population that proved incapable of any independent analysis. As most groups, they tended to form their opinions based on their own experiences and the information available to them—unifying myths play a strong role in any culture, and Soviet society should not be seen as exceptional in this regard. The American way of life as an alternative to Soviet reality is therefore as telling about the Soviet state's expectations of its citizens as it is about citizen's desire to fulfill these expectations. People who praised the United States of America were only anti-Soviet because the Soviet state defined them as such: the more tools people had available to form opinions, the more diverse Soviet reality became.

The role of the Soviet state in creating a myth through agitation and propaganda was just as important as the state's reaction (control, surveillance, imprisonment) to people's positive views about America, the counter-myth, which the state classified as anti-Soviet behavior. The emphasis on America makes it possible to focus on some of the forces at play between state and society, as there is ample documentation on how the Communist Party and the Soviet state campaigned against America and American propaganda. America, and all it stood for, was anti-Soviet. The arrest and persecution of Soviet citizens for articulating pro-American sentiments provide insight into the Soviet system, its people, and how both state and society created the official and public myth of a socialist, anti-imperialistic utopia and the anti-Soviet, sometimes private, myth of an anti-socialist America. This private myth of "good" America could not have existed without the myth of the public "bad" America.

## Chapter 3

### Propaganda Wars: In Lieu of Cultural Relations, 1945-53

Alternative sources of information such as foreign radio broadcasts and publications contributed in part to the creation of a Soviet counter-myth at the popular level. As we have seen, this counter-myth compared America and the American way of life to Soviet realities and the authorities reacted to it by imprisoning people found guilty of echoing these sentiments. Furthermore, the Soviet government attempted to counter and limit American propaganda, both in the Soviet Union and in the United States. Beginning in 1944, the American State Department sponsored publication of a journal, *Amerika Illustrated*, in the Soviet Union and, in 1947, the Voice of America broadcast its first Russian-language program. In this chapter, I look at measures taken to prevent American propaganda from reaching the Soviet population during the late Stalin period.

American propaganda certainly contributed to the making of the American counter-myth. Thus, Soviet reactions to the American myth were part of a larger problem, namely, how to fight American propaganda in the Soviet Union as well as anti-Soviet propaganda in the United States. In addition to the anti-American campaign in the USSR, Soviet authorities propagandized globally against the United States and worked hard to present Soviet-style socialism internationally. The attempt to control images and perceptions of America in the Soviet Union was therefore part of a larger campaign to fight anti-Soviet propaganda at home and abroad.

Both in reacting to American propaganda and in representing Soviet socialism, perceptions of America and reactions to them played a key role in Soviet strategies on how to fight the Soviet-American propaganda war of the postwar Stalin years. After the war, American voices reached Soviet audiences in a broader variety of media than before. As a result, the Soviet Communist Party adopted strong measures of internal and social control in order to prevent undesired information from reaching the Soviet public. Whereas during the first half of the twentieth century the American government showed limited interest in the young Soviet Union, this changed quickly with the rise of the Cold War. Soon the American government put great resources into strengthening a global propaganda mission about the American way of life.

During the ideological competition of the Cold War, it became all the more important for the Soviet authorities to project a positive image of the socialist state and gain support for the socialist cause, at home and abroad. The Soviet side was much more successful in containing American propaganda at home than it was in spreading the socialist message among American audiences. In fighting the propaganda war in the United States, Soviet cultural officials repeatedly turned to Soviet leaders for advice on how to proceed. The Soviet Union, presenting itself as an advocate of international peace and prosperity for all classes, could not tolerate American propaganda targeting the lack of democracy and freedom in the Soviet Union. It was important for Soviet authorities to counter American propaganda at home and abroad because they did not want the Soviet people to doubt the system, and the more American “friends” they had, helping them undermine official American propaganda, the better.



While this chapter considers both Soviet and American propaganda strategies, it mainly focuses on Soviet reactions to the American propaganda campaign and Soviet efforts to gather support for its own campaign. First, however, I give a brief overview of the rise of American cultural and political relations with European countries during and immediately after the war in order to situate the unique Soviet case within a larger context. I then turn to Soviet reactions to American propaganda before examining Soviet efforts to appeal to Americans. Few Americans visited the Soviet Union during the late Stalin period, but one guest, American writer John Steinbeck, left a paper trail in Russian archives that reveals the Kremlin's treatment of those foreigners who ventured behind the Iron Curtain during the Stalin period. Steinbeck's experience and the Soviet government's treatment of him shed light on Soviet strategies for fighting the cultural propaganda war with the United States.

### **The American Cultural Offensive in the Soviet Union**

During the Second World War, American officials in Washington began to realize the great potential for the United States to promote American culture abroad. In the postwar period, they believed they needed to counter images of the rich American gangster jazz fan promoted by the fascist powers during the Second World War. For this purpose, they focused on promoting the freedom and pluralism of American society.<sup>1</sup> As the Cold War intensified, American propaganda took on the Soviet Union, emphasizing the country's lack of democracy and encouraging comparisons between Soviet and Nazi rule. By the early

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<sup>1</sup>For a very good analysis of the American propaganda campaign, see Laura Belmonte's *Selling America: Propaganda, National Identity, and the Cold War, 1945-1959* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, forthcoming 2006).

1950s, the totalitarian school had become a dominant paradigm in academic literature, as McCarthy-era America denounced Soviet rule.

If there was some hesitation in Washington about the extent psychological warfare should take in the postwar period, the dawning of the Cold War removed all doubt. Around the time the Soviet state launched its anti-Western campaign, painting the United States as “the leader of imperialistic expansion and aggression, the main stronghold of the global reactionary,”<sup>2</sup> the American government went ahead with its own anti-Soviet propaganda campaign. In 1948, Republicans H. Alexander Smith (Senator-New Jersey) and Karl Mundt (Representative-North Dakota) called for a strong information program to counter Soviet propaganda throughout the world. The Smith-Mundt Act took effect on January 27, 1948, calling for the promotion of a “better understanding of the United States among the peoples of the world.”<sup>3</sup> The Smith-Mundt Act anticipated mobilizing all modern media, as well as exchange programs and exhibitions, to publicize the virtues of the United States of America.<sup>4</sup> However, until 1955, the American cultural offensive in the Soviet Union consisted almost solely of two sources: the broadcasts of the Voice of America and, to a lesser extent, the publication of the journal *Amerika*.<sup>5</sup> These were the only two American sources of information that stood a chance of reaching a broad Soviet public until the mid-1950s, when American theater groups and various entertainers drew much attention in the Soviet Union.

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<sup>2</sup>Rossiiskii gosudarstvennyi arkhiv sotsial'no-politicheskoi istorii, hereafter RGASPI, f. 17, op. 132, d. 467, l. 22.

<sup>3</sup>Walter L. Hixson, *Parting the Curtain: Propaganda, Culture, and the Cold War, 1945-1961* (New York: St. Martin's Press, 1998), 10-11.

<sup>4</sup>Hixson, *Parting the Curtain*, 11.

<sup>5</sup>Radio Liberty, also funded by the United States government, started its broadcasts in 1953.

Many European countries had been exposed to American troops during the war, and while not all these encounters were positive, the soldiers, their Armed Forces Radio Network, chocolates, chewing gum, and cigarettes left quite an impression on many, including Soviet soldiers.<sup>6</sup> Then, with the help of the Marshall Plan, many Western European countries were inundated with things American: a side effect of economic assistance was a flow of American consumer and convenience products, such as cars and refrigerators, which to many symbolized prosperity and success.

While economic and cultural relations between the United States and European countries strengthened in the postwar period, Soviet authorities defined America as the antithesis of socialism and thus rejected America and all that it stood for on behalf of the Soviet people. By promoting anti-Americanism and imprisoning people who were not patriotic enough, the Soviet state went to great lengths to control the way America was perceived. Soviet domestic propaganda efforts far outdid even Red Scare propaganda and McCarthyism, which terrorized American society in the late 1940s and early 1950s. It was certainly ironic, however, that the United States should start presenting itself as the leader of the free world while McCarthyism thrived in America. The Soviet side feasted on this. McCarthyism impeded the way that cultural relations with foreign countries were conducted,<sup>7</sup> giving Soviet authorities much material with which to work when pointing out the “true” America to the Soviet people. McCarthyism also caused practical problems for Soviet propaganda authorities: at a time of such high skepticism of communism, it was almost impossible for

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<sup>6</sup>Richard H. Pells, *Not Like Us: How Europeans Have Loved, Hated, and Transformed American Culture Since World War II* (New York: BasicBooks, 1997), 41-42.

<sup>7</sup>Pells, *Not Like Us*, 76.

them to spread information about the Soviet way of life in the United States. Together, McCarthyism and Stalin's anti-American campaign contributed to the fact that it was very difficult for Soviet propagandists—and the Soviet public—to get any unbiased information about or from the United States.

In the United States, however, it was acknowledged that in order to be able to better fight the Cold War, increased knowledge about the enemy was necessary. In the aftermath of the war, American authorities sponsored academic institutions in their efforts to start up area study programs to train specialists on the Soviet Union. Out of this atmosphere grew the idea that interviewing Soviet World War II refugees would cast light on the Soviet system and life in the Soviet Union. In 1948, the Russian Research Center at Harvard was established: two years later, anthropologist Clyde Kluckhohn and sociologist Alex Inkeles launched the Harvard Project on the Soviet Social System. The United States Air Force financed the project. While the Air Force wanted access to the findings of the project and even requested information on certain themes, the scholars involved with the project claimed they were academically free to conduct their research as they pleased.<sup>8</sup>

The Harvard Project on the Soviet Social System is based on interviews with former Soviet citizens collected through the Refugee Interview Project. While most of the respondents had left the Soviet Union before 1943, the interviews and questionnaires were designed to cast light on contemporary issues.<sup>9</sup> The results of the project were both

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<sup>8</sup>See John T. Witherspoon, "Questioning a Source: A Critical Analysis of the Refugee Interview Project from the Harvard Project on the Soviet Social System" (B.A. Thesis: Harvard University, 2002). Also Raymond Augustine Bauer, *How the Soviet System Works: Cultural, Psychological, and Social Themes* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1956).

<sup>9</sup>Bauer, *How the Soviet System Works*, 3.

interesting and influential as they contributed greatly to the way that American scholars perceived the Soviet people, their values, and disposition toward the Soviet state. Indeed, until the 1990s, the Harvard Refugee Interview Project—in addition to émigré accounts—provided much of the information available on what it was like to live in the Soviet Union as well as how the Soviet people perceived the United States. Certainly, information from the project helped influence American policy on how to propagandize to this part of the world.

Because the Soviet refugees provided information about popular perceptions of the United States and the West before the Second World War, their voices helped in creating a powerful discourse about Soviet realities and values so often compared with American myths and ideas. As we have seen, in the prewar period Soviet writers and journalists had fashioned most images of America in the Soviet Union; few Americans had contributed. At the time the interviews were conducted, however, American sources of information had started to play a role. In fact, the project coordinators used the Voice of America to broadcast announcements of the project in refugee camps in Germany, thus recruiting interviewees.

One of the major conclusions of the Harvard project was that that if Soviet authorities made concessions to their people, in terms of living standards and consumerism, people's belief in "capitalist aggression" might diminish accordingly. The project's results, however, also indicated that with improvement in living standards came increased support for the Soviet regime. Of course, this support would depend on the regime's ability to guarantee food and other essentials. The project leaders also concluded that "increased standards of living, once in existence, will be difficult to take away," and suggested that demands for

higher living standards would “increase the resistance to repressive controls.”<sup>10</sup> American propagandists acted on this conclusion, constructing their propaganda around attractive images of cars and refrigerators—relying on the rising culture of convenience and everyman’s access to consumer products.<sup>11</sup> The American way of life was thus mainly presented through images of consumerism and workers’ ability to buy amenities, emphasizing American values such as democracy, freedom of speech, and social mobility. In the Soviet Union, the journal *Amerika* and the radio broadcasts of the Voice of America were responsible for spreading this propaganda.

### **“A Modern Day El Dorado!”: Soviet Reactions to American Propaganda**

American officials believed that both the Voice of America and *Amerika* succeeded in “diminishing the effectiveness of Soviet internal propaganda.”<sup>12</sup> As with much of our knowledge about the Soviet Union, however, this view was particularly stressed by Soviet dissidents and the often self-righteous literature that praises the efforts of American propaganda abroad as a form of Americanization or cultural globalization. References to the Voice of America or *Amerika Illustrated* are commonly made in passing, mostly as proof of the successes of American propaganda in the Soviet Union. Very little has been done,

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<sup>10</sup>Bauer, *How the Soviet System Works*, 245-51. Of course, the alternative scenario would have been that with an unchanged leadership style in the Kremlin, “the improved morale might be seized upon for an all-out war at a time when the West was relatively weak or internally split and when Soviet industrial production had approached equality to that of the West” (246).

<sup>11</sup>Laura Belmonte discusses how prominent advocates of modernization theory among social scientists, including Alex Inkeles and Whitman Rostow, worked as consultants to the American administration in the 1950s and 1960s. Laura Belmonte, “Selling Capitalism: Modernization and U.S. Overseas Propaganda, 1945-1959” in David C. Engerman et al. eds, *Staging Growth: Modernization, Development, and the Global Cold War* (Amherst and Boston: University of Massachusetts Press, 2003), 108.

<sup>12</sup>Hixson, *Parting the Curtain*, 32.

however, to show how Soviet authorities and the public reacted to American propaganda during the early Cold War.

Without a full-scale content analysis of the American media, and without sources on the Soviet people's reception of them, it is difficult to assess the real impact of American propaganda. As we have seen, however, it is possible to draw some conclusions based on rehabilitation files from the Soviet procuracy, as people often referred to either the Voice of America or *Amerika* as their source of information. The official Soviet attitude on jamming of international broadcasts remained stable during the late Stalin era, dominated by great anxiety and strategies to hinder the effects of the radio broadcasts. The Soviet attitude on the publication of *Amerika* is more complicated, because its publication was bound to a legal agreement between the Soviet Union and the United States concluded in 1944.<sup>13</sup> Be that as it may, the authorities limited people's access to the journal, and I discovered cases of people being imprisoned for anti-Soviet behavior if they talked about the contents of this *legal* publication.

In the immediate postwar period, Soviet authorities reacted similarly to both *Britanskii Soiuznik* (*The British Ally*), published by the British government, and *Amerika*. The British had published *Britanskii Soiuznik* in the Soviet Union since 1942;<sup>14</sup> after the war, residual feelings of friendship contributed to the Soviet authorities' surprisingly laissez faire attitude toward these publications. *Amerika* was first published in 1944, and its circulation was limited to 10,000 copies. (The American Embassy actually published two different journals,

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<sup>13</sup>RGASPI, f. 17, op. 125, d. 355, l. 102.

<sup>14</sup>Vladimir O. Pechatnov, "The Rise and Fall of *Britansky Soyuznik*: A Case Study in Soviet Response to British Propaganda of the Mid-1940s," *Historical Journal* 41, no. 1 (1998): 293-301.

*Amerika* and *Amerika Illustrated*, each published in 5,000 copies.) On April 24, 1946, however, the Ministry of Foreign Affairs announced that as of June 1, 1946, *Amerika* could be printed in runs of 50,000 copies. From then on, only the illustrated version of the journal was issued.<sup>15</sup> In early July 1946, the American Embassy in Moscow complained, however, that 22,500 copies of the fifth issue of *Amerika* (1945) were being detained in the warehouses of *Mezhdunarodnaia kniga* (*International Books*), responsible for distributing the magazine. According to the Soviets, the Americans had jumped the gun; the increase in the press run was supposed to take effect only with issues 1 and 2 for 1946. Concerned, the Soviet Ministry of Communications concluded that it was “necessary to decide what to do with the additional 40,000 copies of *Amerika*.” Ministry officials claimed it would be “pointless” to allow the free sale of the journal, because it would not sell. It is more likely, however, that free retail sale was not something that Soviet authorities aspired to. As we shall see, they tried to prevent *Amerika* from reaching readers outside of approved circles.<sup>16</sup>

In early 1947, however, Agitprop recommended to Zhdanov that the circulation of both *Britanskii Soiuznik* and *Amerika* be limited to 30,000 copies in subscription and 10,000 in retail sale. Clearly concerned about the readership, Agitprop proposed that subscriptions be allowed “only for patriotic workers of central party and Soviet organizations, the Central

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<sup>15</sup>RGASPI, f. 17, op. 125, d. 436 ll. 5-6.

<sup>16</sup>Ibid. First, *International Books* bought the whole print run of each issue from the American Embassy. Then, *International Books* turned the edition over to *Union Print*, which was in charge of distributing the magazine to sellers.



Committees of the Communist Party (Bolsheviks) in the Union republics as well as ministries of foreign affairs.” Retail sales “should not exceed 4,000 copies.”<sup>17</sup>

Despite curbs on subscriptions and retail sale quotas, *Amerika* did reach a portion of the Soviet people. In 1947, 7,500 issues went to subscribers in Moscow and another 8,300 issues went to Soviet institutions; 21,400 issues went to subscribers outside of Moscow, and, overall, 14,000 issues went on sale (10,000 in Moscow).<sup>18</sup> Soiuzpechat’ (Union Print) kiosks were supposed to sell *Amerika*, but they were located in only three Soviet cities: Moscow, Leningrad, and Kiev; in other cities the leaders of the local party organizations organized the sales.<sup>19</sup> It is difficult to say how the journal was received, as not just anyone could take out a subscription, but Soviet worries about the potential of *Amerika* to actually reach part of the population only increased.

In 1949, Soviet authorities started taking measures that eventually resulted in the State Department’s canceling the publication of *Amerika* in 1952. Several Soviet organizations were involved in the publication of *Amerika*. Soiuzpechat’ was responsible for printing the journal and Mezhdunarodnaia Kniga for distributing it. In 1949, these organizations complained to Molotov and Agitprop that the journal was not selling well. Mezhdunarodnaia Kniga bought each press run in full from the American Embassy and, since it was allegedly not selling well, Mezhdunarodnaia Kniga was left with unsold issues and a loss in revenue.<sup>20</sup>

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<sup>17</sup>RGASPI, f. 17, op. 125, d. 436, ll. 41-42. Also cited in Pechatnov, “The Rise and Fall of *Britansky Soiuznik*,” 300. Translation is my own.

<sup>18</sup>RGASPI, f. 17, op. 125, d. 436, l. 7. The final 1,800 copies were distributed to unspecified editors.

<sup>19</sup>RGASPI, f. 82, op. 2, d. 982, ll. 27-29.

<sup>20</sup>RGASPI, f. 82, op. 2, d. 982, ll. 27-29.

Therefore, Mezhdunarodnaia Kniga suggested to Molotov that both the quantity and the price of *Amerika* be reduced.<sup>21</sup> Not everyone agreed that it would be beneficial to reduce the press run. Molotov, for example, thought it too strict,<sup>22</sup> and several people agreed with him, stressing that they could not really reduce the press run since they were already doing an absolute minimum to keep the terms of the contract with the Americans.<sup>23</sup> Still, the Soviet side concluded that reducing the press run was the best option and started outlining their conditions for continued publication of *Amerika*, stating that since “demand from the population” was decreasing and the Soviet organizations Union Print and International Books were suffering losses, they could not support continued publication.<sup>24</sup>

These discussions first reached American officials in December 1949 when Soiuzpechat’ issued a statement about the unsatisfactory sales of *Amerika*.<sup>25</sup> Soiuzpechat’ maintained that *Amerika* was on sale in three to fifty Soiuzpechat’ kiosks in more than seventy cities in the Soviet Union. In the same announcement, Soiuzpechat’ claimed that up to half the run of every issue remained unsold.<sup>26</sup> As we have seen, 1949 marked the high point of the anti-American campaign in the Soviet arts, and allowing the publication of *Amerika* was certainly counterproductive to the official Soviet goals at the time. The American Embassy therefore rightly doubted the figures about the availability of *Amerika* in the Soviet Union: American

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<sup>21</sup>Ibid.

<sup>22</sup>RGASPI, f. 82, op. 2, d. 982, l. 32.

<sup>23</sup>RGASPI, f. 82, op. 2, d. 982, ll. 33-35.

<sup>24</sup>RGASPI, f. 82, op. 2, d. 982, ll. 49-52.

<sup>25</sup>*Foreign Relations of the United States, 1950* 4 (hereafter *FRUS*, year vol): 1119-20.

<sup>26</sup>*FRUS*, 1950 4: 1103-4.

Embassy staff had “failed to find *Amerika* on sale in twenty-four Soviet cities” and suspected that Union Print had not distributed the magazine at all.<sup>27</sup> Furthermore, the American Embassy estimated that Soviet readers had “great interest” in the journal and that Soviet authorities made sure they had no access to it. A November Central Committee report actually predicted how a conversation with the American Embassy might go, with test questions and examples of good answers. An interesting feature of the report is that it stresses how it would be beneficial for the Soviet side to emphasize that it was following “normal practices” and thus appeal to the American way of doing business: “not one American firm would agree to work under such disadvantageous conditions.”<sup>28</sup> The Soviet discussions about this repeatedly emphasized that they were representing “commercial organizations,” and that they were merely suggesting normal business practices. Of course, neither Soiuzpechat’ nor International Books was a commercial organization in the American understanding—they were state agencies subject to Soviet propaganda and censorship. The conditions as they presented them to the Americans, i.e., reducing both the quantity and price of *Amerika*, were such that it was highly unlikely that the Americans would meet them. Anxious to keep on publishing the journal, however, the Americans did not rule out meeting Soviet conditions. The American Embassy was ready to explore a reduction in price,<sup>29</sup> and embassy workers suggested that they could distribute the journal themselves and not rely on Soiuzpechat’. This was unacceptable to the Soviet side, confirming that it did not want to strengthen efforts to distribute the journal.

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<sup>27</sup>FRUS, 1950 4: 1119-20.

<sup>28</sup>RGASPI, f. 82, op. 2, d. 982, ll. 49-52.

<sup>29</sup>FRUS, 1950 4: 1120.

The American suspicion that the content, and not the technicalities of distribution, were the real problems the Soviets had with *Amerika* was probably right on target. In a 1951 letter to Malenkov, A. Khan'kovskii, member of the Communist Party and a self-appointed guardian of Soviet values, summarized the contents of the forty-sixth issue of *Amerika*, writing that:

American propagandists try to present Soviet readers with utterly foolish fabrications about contemporary economic and social relations in the USA. Colorful diagrams, false numbers, dishonest facts, and other deceitful falsifications from the State Department try to impose on the Soviet readers an impression that America is a modern day El Dorado! *Amerika* maintains that, on average, American working families earn fifty-six dollars a week, they live in clover, and every week they can buy a men's suit, a lady's pair of shoes, stockings, and other clothing, eat lots of meat, eggs, butter and oranges, live in big three-room apartments, etc. This average worker even has a nice car, with a value of 1,700 dollars and a savings account.<sup>30</sup>

Dismayed, Khan'kovskii queried, "Have you read this journal?" One of the problems, he said, was that the issues were produced on schedule and quickly distributed and "always coincide with important events taking place in our country." He noted, for example, how the "famous decision by our party" to focus on forestation had pushed *Amerika* also to publish articles about forestation and the fight against erosion in the USA: "I am convinced that the dishonest propaganda of *Amerika* gives us plenty of wonderful material for counterpropaganda, to expose the American way of life, but we are not using these possibilities. It is unbelievable, but it is a fact!"<sup>31</sup> Malenkov sent this letter to M. A. Suslov,

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<sup>30</sup>RGASPI, f. 17, op. 132, d. 486, ll. 131-32. The letter is also published in D. G. Nadzhafov, *Stalin i kosmopolitizm: Dokumenty Agitpropa TsK KPSS, 1945-1953* (Moscow: Materik, 2005), 622.

<sup>31</sup>RGASPI, f. 17, op. 132, d. 486, ll. 131-32.

then editor of *Pravda* but formerly the chief director of the Agitprop Commission of the CPSU, asking him to familiarize himself with its contents.<sup>32</sup>

Khan'kovskii's concerns about the persuasiveness and accessibility of American propaganda in the Soviet Union reflect the fears of the Soviet government as a whole. American propaganda about the quality of life in the United States, as well as its technique of attacking Soviet accomplishments by drawing out the successes of similar American projects, could severely damage the Soviet cause. The authorities were especially sensitive about American propaganda that compared the Soviet Union with the United States—knowing all too well that no amount of counterpropaganda could prevent some Soviet citizens from believing that life was better in America.

After almost two frustrating years of Soviet and American debates about supply and demand, the Americans saw no other way than to cancel the publication in 1952, citing repeated efforts on the Soviet side to limit and inhibit the publication as the reason for doing so.<sup>33</sup> The Soviet side consistently denied that there was any demand for *Amerika* in the Soviet Union. The American side, however, was certain that Soviet readers would read the journal if it were available to them. But the Soviet government had succeeded in limiting access to the journal; the U.S. government did not benefit from printing 50,000 copies of a journal in the hope they would be distributed fairly among the Soviet population. In 1952, the United States government was therefore left with only one medium to propagandize in

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<sup>32</sup>Nadzhafov, *Stalin i kosmopolitizm*, 622. Continuing to worry about the ways American propaganda invaded Soviet society, Khan'kovskii sent another letter to Malenkov and Suslov in October 1951, expressing his disappointment with various publications in Soviet journals, such as *Novoe vremia* and *Novyi mir*, which in his opinion “grossly distorted the facts of Soviet and American realities.”

<sup>33</sup>Gosudarstvennyi Arkhiv Rossiiskoi Federatsii, hereafter GARF, f. 5283, op. 22, d. 338, l. 113.

the Soviet Union: the Voice of America (VOA). Unlike *Amerika*, however, the radio broadcasts of the VOA were illegal, and, if anything, the Soviet Union fought more fiercely against the influences of the VOA than it had against *Amerika*.

The Voice of America started its broadcasts to the Soviet Union on February 17, 1947.<sup>34</sup> The VOA was on the air every day for two hours: one and a half hours in the European part of the Soviet Union and half an hour in the Far East.<sup>35</sup> Over the following decades, it steadily increased its operation, broadcasting in nine languages to all parts of the Soviet Union.<sup>36</sup> American officials believed that the Soviet government would allow the broadcasts to go undisturbed, as jamming would send out a sure signal of the broadcasts' appeal. The Americans were wrong. Jamming of the Russian-language broadcasts started in 1948. Not wanting to put a legal ban on listening to foreign radio broadcasts, the Soviet government opted instead for the costly and intensive jamming of the program.<sup>37</sup> The jamming, however, was neither exhaustive nor completely successful: the broadcasts reached many corners of the Soviet Union.

A 1948 report to the Central Committee from S. Shatilov presented and analyzed the purposes of the Voice of America. Shatilov based his report on a bulletin called "Armed

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<sup>34</sup>Ludmilla Alexeyeva, *U.S. Broadcasting to the Soviet Union* (New York: U.S. Helsinki Watch Committee, 1986), 9 and 79. The languages are Russian, Ukrainian, Georgian, Armenian, Azeri, Uzbek, Estonian, Latvian, and Lithuanian. The Baltic countries were assigned to the VOA European division (because the US did not recognize incorporation of the three Baltic republics into the USSR).

<sup>35</sup>RGASPI, f. 17, op. 132, d. 92, l. 70.

<sup>36</sup>Alexeyeva, *U.S. Broadcasting to the Soviet Union*, 9 and 79. The languages are Russian, Ukrainian, Georgian, Armenian, Azeri, Uzbek, Estonian, Latvian, and Lithuanian. The Baltic countries were assigned to the VOA European division (because the US did not recognize incorporation of the three Baltic republics into the USSR).

<sup>37</sup>Hixson, *Parting the Curtain*, 34.

Forces Talk” published by the American Armed Forces. The report discussed the place of the Voice of America in the state apparatus of the United States and remarked how there were between half a million to a million radios in the Soviet Union that could receive the Voice of America. The Americans estimated that, in 1950, between three and four million radios could be found in the Soviet Union and that already a “large number of Russians, from the Urals to the Polish border, regularly listen to the American programs.”<sup>38</sup>

Walter L. Hixson claims that “contrasts between light and dark, good and evil, worship of God and atheism, were a staple of VOA broadcasting.”<sup>39</sup> The programs maligned totalitarian control over almost every aspect of private and public life: the right to travel abroad, collectivization, wages, long working hours, privileges granted to Communist Party members, limitations on creativity, and denial of freedom of religion, to name a few. VOA radio hosts discussed how Western freedom fostered a thriving culture of artists and intellectuals, whereas the Soviet system stifled and often punished those with creative talent. Furthermore, the VOA explained the U.S. electoral process, emphasizing that the people selected their own leaders through free elections. The role of a free press was also discussed but “most of all, however, programming constantly emphasized the higher standard of living, better health care, abundant consumer goods and leisure activities, and relative ease of everyday life in the West.”<sup>40</sup> Hixson also maintains that the VOA targeted intellectuals “as

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<sup>38</sup>RGASPI, f. 17, op. 132, d. 92, l. 70.

<sup>39</sup>Hixson, *Parting the Curtain*, 42.

<sup>40</sup>Ibid., 40, 42-44. Quote on p. 43.

those most likely to have access to shortwave radios and to listen to and be influenced by Western propaganda”<sup>41</sup>

At the height of the anti-American campaign in the late 1940s, Soviet propaganda against the VOA focused on trying to uncover “lies” about the United States.<sup>42</sup> Knowing that they could never completely prevent foreign radio broadcasts from reaching the Soviet people, Soviet authorities’ strategy was to counter information presented by the Voice of America with writings about the “second America.”<sup>43</sup> This took precedence over trying to keep check on facts about the Soviet Union presented in American propaganda—surely it was easier to produce anti-American propaganda than try to counter American propaganda about the Soviet Union. Five years later, in 1953, Soviet authorities had started to worry more about VOA’s broadcasting about Soviet domestic affairs and politics.<sup>44</sup> As we saw in chapter 2, people often reviled Soviet realities while imagining a better life in America. Judging also by the Soviet government’s reactions, the VOA was hitting a raw nerve among at least some of its listeners.

In the late 1940s and the 1950s, American and Western broadcasters presenting an alternative image of both the outside world and inside realities succeeded in reaching an audience in the Soviet Union. In 1950, the regional office of the Communist Party in the Karelo-Finskoi SSR reported that people were tuning in to foreign anti-Soviet radio

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<sup>41</sup>Hixson, *Parting the Curtain*, 38.

<sup>42</sup>*The Image of the Voice of America as Drawn in Soviet Media*. Prepared for the Office of Research and Intelligence at the United States Information Agency by the Department of Sociology (New Brunswick: Rutgers University, 1954).

<sup>43</sup>Alex Inkeles, *Social Change in Soviet Russia* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1968), 346.

<sup>44</sup>*The Image of the Voice of America*.



broadcasts. The local party apparatus seemed overwhelmed with how widespread an activity listening to foreign radio was in this region.<sup>45</sup> Similarly, the local party cell in the Chutkotskii region reported several incidents of people listening to the Voice of America, noting that they would undertake strict and intensive work against such radio broadcasts.<sup>46</sup> While listening to the Voice of America was not forbidden by law, it could be interpreted as counterrevolutionary activity, and therefore people took a risk when they listened to the program. Since the content of the broadcasts corresponded with the state's definition of anti-Soviet behavior, it is no wonder that the Soviet government tried to limit and respond to foreign broadcasts. It did not always succeed, but if citizens got caught in the act of listening to American or other foreign radio broadcasts, they could face dire consequences.

For instance, in November 1951, Ivan Ivanovich, a war veteran and former locksmith of middle peasant origins, was sentenced according to article 58-10 of the criminal code to five years of hard labor in the Gulag and disenfranchised for ten years. In 1950-51, he had systematically spread anti-Soviet agitation among kolkhoz workers in his home region of Karamzin. Furthermore, he "praised life in America, maligned Soviet realities, life on the kolkhoz, Soviet trade unions and praised American unions." In the summer of 1951 he had praised American and English production while degrading Soviet manufacturing: "everything is done by Stakhanovite methods—quantity matters more than quality."<sup>47</sup> Furthermore, Ivan Ivanovich had asked an acquaintance—who later testified against him—to find him a foreign bicycle, but "of good quality." He told another that "it is all propaganda:

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<sup>45</sup>RGASPI, f. 17, op. 88, d. 950, ll. 74-75.

<sup>46</sup>RGASPI, f. 17, op. 88, d. 950, l. 50.

<sup>47</sup>GARF, f. A-461, op. 1, d. 131, ll. 16-20 and 29.

goods may be cheaper, but wages are lower.” Ivan Ivanovich also claimed that the Kremlin exploited the peasants, especially those working on the collective farms, and that “the Americans tell the truth about us.” He invited people to visit him in order to listen to “the true voice of America”<sup>48</sup> and spread the word of how “in America workers have more privileges. They may speak freely, they have a car, we only have serfdom. People are not allowed to say anything, and if they do, they will find themselves in prison.” He did not tire of telling people in his kolkhoz about the “good life of peasants” in the United States, consistently complaining about his own life in the Soviet Union and doubting the Soviet system. He maintained that “everything they write about England and America in the papers is a lie” and “radio ‘Voice of America’ broadcasts the truth about the Soviet Union.”<sup>49</sup>

Similarly, in January 1952 a Russian woman born in 1896 was sentenced to ten years in the Gulag (with a possibility of a reduced sentence of five years) for repeatedly spreading “counterrevolutionary agitation.” She complained about the leaders of the CPSU, the Soviet government, the life of workers in the Soviet Union, and Soviet foreign policy. She had listened to foreign radio broadcasts and, based on what she heard, she “told anti-Soviet anecdotes and praised life in prerevolutionary Russia and in imperialist countries.” She

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<sup>48</sup>This is likely a play of words with the title of a famous article by Ilya Ehrenburg published in *Kul'tura i zhizn'* April 10, 1947. The article was entitled “A False Voice” and marked the opening of the Soviet attack on the Voice of America. In a quantitative study of the Soviet response to the Voice of America, Alex Inkeles considered the Soviet Press and Soviet radio broadcasts and the frequency of references to VOA in them. He concluded that most references to the VOA were made in passing but in looking at how Soviet sources countered the impact of the VOA, he concluded that they did so almost solely “by presenting a negative picture of the United States, its policies and intentions, rather than by concentrating on redrawing the negative image of the Soviet Union which the VOA disseminates.” See Alex Inkeles, “The Soviet Attack on the Voice of America: A Case Study in Propaganda Warfare,” *American Slavic and East European Review* 12, no. 3 (1953), 333. See also his “Soviet Reactions to the Voice of America” *Public Opinion Quarterly* 16, no. 4 (1952-1953): 612-17.

<sup>49</sup>GARF, f. A-461, op. 1, d. 131, l. 18.

denied the accusations, claiming that she had listened to the Voice of America once at her brother's house, then left for work where she told one colleague of her actions: "but it is impossible to call it anti-Soviet agitation . . . it is not true that I said America broadcasts the truth." However, the Soviet procuracy chose to believe that what she had said was that "the American broadcasts say that our lives are bad, that workers get paid very little, and are forced to work. The Americans tell it as it really is."<sup>50</sup> Although the woman admitted to having listened to the Voice of America, she denied that the programs had made a positive impression on her. She had neither agreed with what she heard nor been inspired to malign Soviet realities. It was, however, enough of a crime to listen to the Voice of America broadcasts.

It is clear that alternative sources of information played an important role in promoting favorable comments about the West. Take, for example, Sergei Sergeevich, an engineer from Leningrad born in 1909, who accepted the criminal responsibility of having spread over several years the contents of anti-Soviet broadcasts of the Voice of America, BBC, and Radio Free Europe among his friends. He had maligned the Communist Party and its policies, strongly criticizing Soviet democracy as well as Soviet press and radio. He praised the living standards of working-class people in capitalist countries while disapproving of the conditions of workers in the Soviet Union.<sup>51</sup> In a later appeal, this man wrote that he did not deny having listened to and discussed foreign broadcasts, but he did not see this as anti-Soviet agitation. He claimed, indeed, not to have commented in any way on the quality of the radio

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<sup>50</sup>GARF, f. A-461, op. 1, d. 1307, ll. 9-14. For a similar statement mentioning the Voice of America as a source of information, see GARF, f. 8131, op. 31, d. 40704, l. 6.

<sup>51</sup>GARF, f. 8131, op. 31, d. 78153, l. 4.

broadcasts, and his remarks should therefore not be seen as anti-Soviet.<sup>52</sup> As in the case above, however, it was bad enough to have listened to the radio station.

An interesting case related to the Voice of America and its Soviet audience is the story of B., a railroad conductor. Following the death of Comrade Stalin on March 5, 1953, B. had listened to the Voice of America at her sister's house. What she heard had deeply upset her. Completely indignant, she cried and railed against the Americans for broadcasting this slander.<sup>53</sup> All the witnesses provided the same testimony, i.e., that she had not agreed with what she had heard, and the court eventually ruled in favor of the defendant based on these testimonies.<sup>54</sup> In the end, she was only fined and not sentenced to prison, but one wonders whether the timing of her case—she was arrested on March 24—did not have more to do with the fearful atmosphere that prevailed in the Soviet Union immediately following Stalin's death earlier that month. Listening to the Voice of America made her guilty of anti-Soviet behavior, but denouncing what she heard certainly did not make her into a full-fledged “counterrevolutionary.”

From the state's perspective, it was enough of a crime to have listened to the broadcasts because their content corresponded with the state's definition of anti-Soviet behavior. That people were prosecuted for anti-Soviet behavior and imprisoned in and of itself shows the reaction of authorities to positive statements about the United States of America. Views about America such as the ones ascribed to “anti-Soviet” citizens by the state existed in the Soviet Union. American propaganda succeeded in creating an alternative discourse among

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<sup>52</sup>GARF, f. 8131, op. 31, d. 78153, l. 26.

<sup>53</sup>GA RF, f. 8131, op. 31, d. 43064, l. 3.

<sup>54</sup>Ibid., d. 43064, l. 4.

some of its Soviet listeners, who judged the internal propaganda to be invalid because it was so removed from their everyday experiences. In some cases, the alternative reality of the “American way of life” helped people deal with everyday life in the Soviet Union: the American “truth” about the Soviet Union corresponded with these people’s experiences in a way that the official Soviet discourse did not.

### **A Soviet Peace Offensive: Fighting the Propaganda War at Home and Abroad**

Soviet authorities fought an uphill battle in countering American propaganda, not only in the Soviet Union but also in the United States. In 1946 the Soviet All-Union Society for Cultural Relations with Foreign Countries (VOKS) concluded that the American government “put forth great activity in its goal of taking control of cultural relations between Soviet and American organizations and individual cultural agents.”<sup>55</sup> The Soviet side had no interest in establishing cultural relations on American terms, but it was also acutely aware of the growing hostility toward the Soviet Union and its front organizations in the United States and realized it needed to keep some channels open.

VOKS rightfully suspected the U.S. State Department of wanting to limit the appeal of American organizations friendly to the Soviet Union, such as the America-Russia Institute in New York. VOKS officials expressed great concern over the establishment of the House Committee on Un-American Activities: it “intervenes against alleged fellow travelers found in all American organizations friendly to the USSR.”<sup>56</sup> Thus, a 1946 report of the American

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<sup>55</sup>GARF, f. 5283, op. 22s, d. 581, l. 27. VOKS stands for Vsesoiuznoe obshchestvo kul’turnykh svyazei s zagranitse.

<sup>56</sup>GARF, f. 5283, op. 22s, d. 581, ll. 25-26.

division of VOKS noted the “outburst of reactionary and anti-Soviet propaganda, inspired by aggressive imperialistic cliques in the United States,” maintaining, however, that “interest in the Soviet Union [among the American people] has not decreased.”<sup>57</sup> A 1947 report bears witness to the growing difficulties of carrying out an information campaign in the United States, voicing concern over “the diffusion of imperialistic, racist and militaristic ideas [in the United States], maligning the Soviet people and its culture.”<sup>58</sup> In order to counteract this, VOKS officials claimed that, in spite of the uphill battle, they urgently needed to familiarize American society with the achievements of the Soviet Union in the social, economic, and cultural spheres. To this effect, it would be necessary to “show the superiority of the Soviet socialist system over the capitalist system of the USA, especially the preeminence of Soviet democracy as a higher form of democracy.”<sup>59</sup>

In both 1946 and 1947, VOKS officials in America continuously pleaded with Moscow to respond to increasing anti-Soviet propaganda, complaining about the lack of materials and resources. Not much happened. In 1952, the Soviet Embassy in Washington announced that, due to the Communist witch hunts of Senator Joseph McCarthy, VOKS was effectively paralyzed in the United States.<sup>60</sup> Soviet diplomats in the United States certainly worked in unfavorable conditions. The persecution and repression of progressive individuals and organizations in the United States had blocked access to virtually everyone “loyally disposed to the Soviet Union.” The embassy concluded that, without access to the progressive

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<sup>57</sup>GARF, f. 5283, op. 22s, d. 581, ll. 27-28. Quote on l. 27.

<sup>58</sup>GARF, f. 5283, op. 22s, d. 590, ll. 2-3. Quote on l. 2.

<sup>59</sup>GARF, f. 5283, op. 22s, d. 590, l. 2.

<sup>60</sup>GARF, f. 5283, op. 22, d. 338, ll. 133-36.

intelligentsia, possibilities for spreading the word about the Soviet Union were slim to none: “As is known, the work of VOKS can be successful only when there are possibilities for widespread and free relations with the progressive intelligentsia of a given country.” That possibility, however, had temporarily disappeared in the United States.<sup>61</sup>

Such VOKS reports, as well as numerous subsequent documents produced by Soviet cultural relations officers, assumed that if foreigners only learned about Soviet achievements and progress in social and economic spheres and the people’s dedication to peace, they would immediately warm up to the Soviet way of life. The functionality of this approach was proven, VOKS claimed, by the success of a 1946 delegation of Soviet writers to the United States who held “masses of Americans” captive during their meetings. They received so many “questions and friendly comments” about the Soviet Union that VOKS concluded: “the American people listen with attention and sympathy to the words of people who tell the truth about the Soviet Union.”<sup>62</sup> During the Stalin years, not much changed in the way cultural officials analyzed the causes for their lack of success in America. Blaming the failure of the mission on means and methods, Soviet cultural officials failed to point out that, in reality, many Americans distrusted Soviet propaganda about peace and prosperity within socialism. The atmosphere within the Soviet bureaucracy was such that pointing this out to the Kremlin might have been an unnecessary risk for people working in the Soviet cultural bureaucracy, but whether or not cultural officials really understood and knew the way Americans felt remains unclear.

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<sup>61</sup>GARF, f. 5283, op. 22, d. 338, l. 133.

<sup>62</sup>GARF, f. 5283, op. 22s, d. 581, l. 28.

Telling the “truth” about the Soviet Union and socialism was an important part of the overall mission of Soviet cultural, social, economic, and political organizations. In fact, Soviet foreign propaganda had sought to educate foreigners in how to perceive the Soviet Union and its economic, social, and cultural policies ever since the founding of the Communist International, or Comintern, in 1919.<sup>63</sup> Propaganda of the postwar period stressed socialism’s superiority over capitalism in general, and over the United States, as the leader of the capitalist world, in particular. Foreign propaganda, which from 1947 was disseminated through Cominform and various front organizations, was similar in tone to domestic propaganda, where the “truth” about the Soviet Union and the world was published in *Pravda*. The propaganda remained consistent in tone throughout the years, even if the emphases and topics changed according to domestic and international events. In the postwar years, however, the Soviet state’s ideological mission was almost completely paralyzed, as organizations on the Soviet side lacked the means and the methods to propagandize in the United States as was needed. Because of the skepticism in McCarthy’s America, it remains doubtful whether resources and technology would have helped in these early years of the Cold War. More likely, the Soviet “truth” mission itself needed a complete overhaul, but, in

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<sup>63</sup>The Comintern was dissolved in 1943 as a gesture of good will to the allies during the war. In 1947, Stalin created the International Bureau of Communist Parties, the Cominform, which resumed control over the ideological mission abroad, including “providing the Soviet satellites and the whole Communist world with a clear-cut ideological perspective on global confrontation with the United States.” See Vladislav Zubok and Constantine Pleshakov, *Inside the Kremlin’s Cold War: From Stalin to Khrushchev* (Cambridge, Ma.: Harvard University Press, 1996), 110-11. Quote on p. 111. Andrei Alexandrovich Zhdanov was one of the main designers of the new “Cold War mentality inside the Soviet Union.” Ibid., 112. Zhdanov was in charge of two Central Committee departments: the Department of Agitation and Propaganda and the Foreign Policy Department. The Soviet Information Bureau (Sovinformbiuro), the Telegraph Agency of the Soviet Union (TASS), and International Books (Mezhdunarodnaia kniga) were thus all under his control. So were “public organizations” such as the Jewish Anti-Fascist Committee, the All-Slavic Committee, and the All-Union Society for Cultural Ties Abroad (VOKS). Ibid., 119. For more on the ineffective Soviet foreign propaganda network, see V. Pechatnov, “Exercise in Frustration: Soviet Foreign Propaganda in the Early Cold War, 1945-47,” *Cold War History* 1, no. 2 (2001): 1-27.



the meantime, Soviet cultural officials focused more on technical aspects of getting their message across. Soviet authorities used the political atmosphere in the United States as a cover: in reality, their own hostility to all things “capitalist” and “Western” made Soviet-American cultural relations impossible in the postwar Stalin period; changing the Soviet message did not become an option until after Stalin’s death.

As early as 1946, VOKS officials had concluded that because of anti-Soviet propaganda in the United States it was necessary to “help American guests who visit the USSR reach correct conclusions about our country.”<sup>64</sup> Helping foreigners reach “correct conclusions” about the Soviet Union was always an important part of the “truth” mission; however, this mission did not revolve just around how to charm American visitors to the Soviet Union but also around how best to reach out to the American public on its home territory. In 1946, before the first Voice of America broadcasts to the Soviet Union, the Soviet side concluded that American homes possessed more than 60 million radios, which were “an essential part of everyday American life.” They claimed that the only way they would be able to get them to listen to Soviet broadcasts, however, was to “broadcast in American style to Americans.” They noted that because Americans were so religious, Soviet broadcasts should emphasize that the Soviet Union allowed freedom of religion. Furthermore, they should appeal to U.S. concern for rebuilding Soviet cities and industry, without leading Americans to believe that reconstruction also focused on strengthening the defense industry, since they could easily turn such information into complaints that the Soviet Union was preparing for war.<sup>65</sup>

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<sup>64</sup>GARF, f. 5283, op. 22s, d. 581, l. 28.

<sup>65</sup>RGASPI, f. 17, op.; 125, d. 470, ll. 126-27.

While cultural officials were seemingly capable of analyzing the problems potentially inherent in the Soviet message and suggesting improvements in technology, putting all the good advice into practice proved difficult. Being on the winning side of World War II had filled the Soviet leadership with the hope that its country would be accepted as a leader on the world stage,<sup>66</sup> but slowly it realized that the Soviet Union still had to be defended and promoted abroad as a country of social and economic equality whose population valued highbrow culture and was happily constructing real communism. The escalating Cold War quickly turned ordinary Americans against the “Communists,” while the Soviet Communist Party’s anticosmopolitan campaign fueled anti-American sentiments in the Soviet Union. In 1946, however, Soviet officials hoped for better relations, while VOKS workers were set on “helping” Americans realize the “true” nature of the Soviet Union.

### **Organized Interactions: Soviet Cultural Relations with Foreign Countries**

Propaganda efforts were dictated by the Agitprop Commission of the Soviet Communist Party and carried out by several state organizations masked as public ones<sup>67</sup> that reported to and were controlled by the CPSU. After the war, the Ministry of Foreign Affairs remained in charge of all cultural contacts until 1957, when cultural relations found an institutional home at the Ministry of Culture. Owing to the nature of the Soviet bureaucratic machine, the organizational aspect of cultural exchanges reveals much about the ways that the Soviet Union sought to represent itself. During their stay in the Soviet Union, all foreign visitors

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<sup>66</sup>Andrei Zhdanov stated in early 1946 that victory would allow the Soviet Union to “pursue and defend” its foreign policy “under much more favourable conditions than before.” This, however, was a short lived hope. Cited in Pechatnov, “Exercise in Frustration,” 1.

<sup>67</sup>Frederick C Barghoorn, *The Soviet Cultural Offensive: The Role of Cultural Diplomacy in Soviet Foreign Policy* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1960), 158.

were under the auspices of specific state or party controlled organizations, travel agencies, or relevant youth organizations.<sup>68</sup> The same organizations often cooperated with the Central Committee and Soviet Embassy workers in Washington.

The Soviet Council of People's Commissars had set up VOKS on April 5, 1925, as a "public society,"<sup>69</sup> but it was clear to most foreigners that, while claiming to be independent of the government, VOKS reported to the Communist Party: the Kremlin would not have allowed for an organization that dealt with foreigners to have an independent leadership.<sup>70</sup> The main goal of VOKS was to facilitate the establishment and development of academic and cultural relations between Soviet and foreign foundations, public organizations, and individuals involved in academia and culture. VOKS was also responsible for keeping in touch with foreign friendship societies and independent fellow travelers and sympathizers with the Soviet Union.<sup>71</sup> The corresponding friendship societies in foreign countries had

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<sup>68</sup>The relevant ministries were involved with union delegations and special agencies communicated with diplomats and journalists. Intourist (1929-1991) took care of all tourism until 1958 when a special agency, Sputnik (Biuro mezhdunarodnogo molodezhnogo turizma, 1958-1991), was established to organize international youth tourism.

<sup>69</sup>Louis Nemzer, "The Soviet Friendship Societies" *Public Opinion Quarterly* 13, no. 2 (1949): 271. Nemzer claims that VOKS was established on August 8, 1925, but April 5 is the official date for the establishment of VOKS. See S.V. Mironenko, *Fondy Gosudarstvennogo arkhiva Rossiiskoi Federatsii po istorii SSSR*. Vol. 3 (Moscow: Reaktsionno-izdatel'skii otdel federal'nykh arkhivov, 1997), 644. While the financial side of cultural relations is interesting, especially in terms of how much funding American front organizations got directly from Soviet sources, it is not a subject of this dissertation.

<sup>70</sup>Nemzer, "The Soviet Friendship Societies," 271. This is confirmed by VOKS documents, which are also found in party archives since important documents were sent to the Central Committee of the Communist Party, most commonly its Agitprop Commission. Michael David-Fox, who has researched VOKS in the 1930s, claims that VOKS was "something of an orphan in the Soviet bureaucratic hierarchy" as it lacked "a single powerful oversight agency." Michael David-Fox, "From Illusory 'Society' to Intellectual 'Public': VOKS, International Travel and Party-Intelligentsia Relations," *Contemporary European History* 2, no. 1 (2002): 11. This changed after the war with the establishment of Cominform in 1947 and Zhdanov's strict control over institutions involved in the ideological mission.

<sup>71</sup>Nemzer, "The Soviet Friendship Societies," 271-74. According to the VOKS organizational charts, its several departments dealt with anything from book exchanges, exhibits, printed materials, and the receiving of foreigners in the Soviet Union. The VOKS Moscow office had different geographical departments and issues

similar organizational charts, depending on their size and importance, and were always in very close contact with VOKS in Moscow.<sup>72</sup>

VOKS was also responsible for inviting cultural figures to the Soviet Union who usually visited as a part of a delegation.<sup>73</sup> The structure of a delegation was characteristic of the way Soviet authorities wanted cultural relations to take place—a carefully selected and structured group that was easy to control. Soviet authorities designed a detailed itinerary for every delegation and shepherded the delegates around the country. Soviet cultural officials invested much effort in this technique, especially since they depended on the delegates to

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of the United States were dealt with in the American department, which also included Canada and Latin America. Mironenko, *Fondy Gosudarstvennogo arkhiva*, 644.

<sup>72</sup>Further literature on VOKS and national friendship organizations is of various kinds. A few articles have appeared that take advantage of archival material but many more exist that were written before access to the archives. See Ingunn Rotihaug, *‘For Fred of vennskap mellom folkene’: Sambandet Norge-Sovjetunionen, 1945-70* (Oslo: Norwegian Institute for Defence Studies, 2000) for Norway. For Soviet-Icelandic friendship relations see Rósa Magnúsdóttir, “Menningarstríð stórveldanna á Íslandi, 1948-1961” (BA Thesis, 1999) and *ibid.*, “„Menningarstríð í uppsiglingu: Stofnun og upphafsár vinafélaga Bandaríkjanna og Sovétríkjanna á Íslandi” *Ný saga* 12 (2000): 29-40. On French relations with the USSR see Ludmila Stern, “The All-Union Society for Cultural Relations with Foreign Countries and French Intellectuals, 1925-29,” *Australian Journal of Politics and History* 45, no. 1 (1999): 99-109, and L. Stern, “The Background History of Creation of the French Rapprochement Society: The New Russia (based on the unpublished VOKS documents),” *Australian Slavonic and East European Studies* 11, 1-2 (1997): 143-60. Jean-François Fayet, “La société pour les échanges culturels entre l’URSS et l’étranger (VOKS),” *Relations internationales* 115, (Fall 2003): 411-23. For general works on VOKS see A. Golubev and V. Nevezhin, “VOKS in the 1930s-1940s,” *Minuvshye. Istoricheskii Al’makh* (Moscow and St. Petersburg, 1999); M. Kuz’min, *Deiatel’nost’ partii i sovetskogo gosudarstva po razvitiu mezhdunarodnykh nauchnykh i kul’turnykh svyazei SSSR (1917-1932 gg)* (Leningrad: Leningrad University Publishers, 1971); A. Ioffe, *Mezhdunarodnye svyazi sovetskoi nauki, tekhniki i kul’tury. 1917-1932* (Moscow: Nauka, 1975); O. D. Kameneva, “Cultural Rapprochement: The USSR Society for Cultural Relations with Foreign Countries,” in *Pacific Affairs* 1, no. 5 (1928): 6-8. Also, Sylvia R. Margulies, *The Pilgrimage to Russia: The Soviet Union and the Treatment of Foreigners: 1924-1937* (Madison: University of Wisconsin Press, 1968); David Caute, *The Fellow-Travelers* (London: Macmillan, 1973); Paul Hollander, *Political Pilgrims: Travels of Western Intellectuals to the Soviet Union, China and Cuba, 1928-1978* (New York, Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1981); Barghoorn, *The Soviet Cultural Offensive*. Michael David-Fox has recently analyzed VOKS’s relationship with Soviet intellectuals and the Communist Party in the 1930s in a couple of very good articles. See his “From Illusory ‘Society’” and his “The Fellow Travelers Revisited: The ‘Cultured West’ through Soviet Eyes,” *Journal of Modern History* 75 (2003): 300-35.

<sup>73</sup>Nemzer, “The Soviet Friendship Societies,” 273-74.

return home and write positively about the Soviet Union for a wide audience.<sup>74</sup> The pressure to showcase socialism at its best was not lessened when Soviet organizations received fellow travelers. On the contrary, they relied on their positive observations of the Soviet system, and therefore VOKS officials worked very hard to impress fellow travelers. To this effect, VOKS officials were trained to advertise Soviet socialism and both secure and maintain friends of the Soviet Union.<sup>75</sup>

Established on April 11, 1929, under the Ministry of Foreign Trade as the agency responsible for the management of foreign tourism in the USSR, Intourist was in charge of all technical and organizational details relating to foreign tourists in the Soviet Union.<sup>76</sup> Intourist, for example, issued visas and other necessary documents for foreigners. It also took care of transportation and baggage, published guidebooks and information for foreign tourists, arranged for hotels and housing, and organized the sale of souvenirs. Early in 1939, the Soviet Council of People's Commissars also made the agency responsible for training a highly educated staff for working with foreign tourists. In this regard, too, Intourist played a key role in projecting the right image to foreigners.<sup>77</sup>

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<sup>74</sup>Ibid., 274.

<sup>75</sup>VOKS was one of the few "public" organizations that survived Stalin and remained, in somewhat changed form, an important player in Soviet cultural diplomacy throughout the Soviet period. David-Fox, "From Illusory 'Society,'" 10. Michael David-Fox emphasizes the role of the non-party intelligentsia in the early stages of Soviet cultural diplomacy and discusses the role of VOKS within what he calls the two "cultural fronts"—i.e., a domestic as well as an international one.

<sup>76</sup>Mironenko, *Fondy Gosudarstvennogo arkhiva*, 172. See also an Intourist organizational chart from 1948 in GARF, f. 9612, op. 1, d. 186, ll. 1-6.

<sup>77</sup>Mironenko, *Fondy Gosudarstvennogo arkhiva*, 172. Intourist was meant to develop every aspect of foreign tourism in the USSR: it serviced foreign tourists, welcomed them in the USSR, and organized tourism from the USSR to other countries. In the 1960s, when tourism had become more of a common practice, Intourist worked closely with the friendship societies in order to set up contacts for foreigners with "likeminded" Soviet people. GARF, f. 9612, op. 1, d. 555, ll. 1-3.

Soviet cultural institutions such as VOKS carried out connections with American organizations openly friendly to the Soviet Union. According to the United States State Department, the National Council of American-Soviet Friendship (NCASF) was one of the most important Soviet front organizations in the United States. Formed in 1943 by the Communist Party of the United States of America (CPUSA), the National Council of American-Soviet Friendship worked closely with VOKS.<sup>78</sup> During the period under consideration, NCASF had four main centers in the United States: in Chicago, New York, San Francisco, and Los Angeles. The NCASF sponsored “goodwill tours” to the Soviet Union and enabled select Soviet citizens to travel to the United States.<sup>79</sup> During the postwar Stalin era, NCASF was almost exclusively responsible for maintaining Soviet-American cultural relations on the American side. Until the slow revival of official cultural relations in the post-Stalin years, and the official participation of the American State Department in them in 1957, NCASF acted as an intermediary between Soviet authorities and American citizens interested in traveling to the Soviet Union or in corresponding with Soviet citizens.<sup>80</sup>

Several Soviet organizations participated in the peace offensive and, on paper, Soviet efforts in cultural diplomacy looked quite remarkable. Those involved were supposed to receive training in foreign languages and “the supplying and processing of foreign cultural materials” in order to advance their knowledge of cultural diplomacy.<sup>81</sup> Concerned about the

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<sup>78</sup>Clive Rose, *The Soviet Propaganda Network: A Directory of Organisations Serving Soviet Foreign Policy* (London and New York: Pinter Publishers, St. Martin’s Press, 1988), 252.

<sup>79</sup>Rose, *The Soviet Propaganda Network*, 253. The State Department made the work of NCASF very difficult by for example confiscating mail and passports of its members.

<sup>80</sup>The National Council of American-Soviet Friendship and the America-Russia Institute were the main public organizations (front groups) in the United States.

<sup>81</sup>Barghoorn, *The Soviet Cultural Offensive*, 158.

appearance of the Soviet Union, VOKS, Intourist, and NCASF put much effort into training guides and interpreters, preparing delegations, and determining acceptable itineraries for foreigners. Since their responsibilities were not always clearly defined, there was sometimes confusion about which organization was responsible for a foreign visitor in the Soviet Union.<sup>82</sup> In practice, the staff was not well trained and Soviet authorities were unequipped to take on a huge propaganda effort after the war, at home and abroad. Be that as it may, these organizations controlled information about the United States in the Soviet Union, promoted Soviet propaganda in the United States, and took charge of all encounters with foreigners on Soviet soil. They decided what American visitors were allowed to see; where they traveled and where they slept; who they talked to and what about. In sum, as much as they possibly could, they tried to organize the sporadic interactions between Soviet and American people in the postwar period.

### **Rare Encounters with American Culture and Americans**

In the immediate postwar period, few tourists visited the Soviet Union, which had been devastated by war. From 1947 to 1951, VOKS documented only nineteen American groups with a total of fifty-seven visitors. Most of the visitors were well-known American fellow travelers, such as Edwin Smith, director of the National Council of American-Soviet Friendship (visited in 1945) and Paul Robeson, singer, actor, and activist, who came on one of his many visits in 1949.<sup>83</sup> Nevertheless, scant evidence suggests that, shortly after the

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<sup>82</sup>John Steinbeck, *A Russian Journal* (New York and London: Penguin Press, 1999), 16.

<sup>83</sup>GARF, f. 5283, op. 14. d. 573, ll. 1-1a. The report lists American scientific and cultural delegations and visitors from 1947 to 1951.

war, Soviet authorities expressed interest in promoting tourism and cultural contacts but were overcome with practical problems of reconstructing the tourism industry.

Representatives of Intourist visiting a 1947 conference on international tourism in London speculated about the profits generated by the inflow of foreigners to Western European countries. They noted that Americans had started to travel abroad, but that the war-ravaged Soviet Union was not equipped to host foreign visitors: it lacked hotel space in Moscow and in popular tourist destinations in the Crimea, in Rostov-on-Don, and in Sochi; air, land, and rail transportation; and guides and translators.<sup>84</sup> Intourist also noted how capitalist countries, “especially the USA and England,” used tourism to their own economic and political advantage.<sup>85</sup> The Soviet side responded harshly to the postwar aid Americans offered to European countries, especially the Marshall Plan, which encouraged postwar tourism as an effective way to reestablish European economies.<sup>86</sup> Moreover, tourism also offered a means to change a country’s public image.

Although VOKS officials understood that earlier Soviet methods in international cultural diplomacy were not going to work after 1945, there was a lack of initiative from the Kremlin in trying to renew and strengthen Soviet propaganda methods. In 1945, VOKS, celebrating its twentieth anniversary, was prepared to take up renewed cultural relations with the United States, suggesting to Molotov that it was time to think about sending artists to America and

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<sup>84</sup>GARF, f. 9612, op. 1, d. 174, ll. 1-18. Quote l. 1.

<sup>85</sup>In this context, it seemed to also be of some concern that Slavic countries aspired to good relations with the capitalist world.

<sup>86</sup> See for example Brian A. McKenzie, “Creating a Tourist’s Paradise: The Marshall Plan and France, 1948 to 1952,” *French Politics, Culture & Society* 21, no. 1 (2003): 35-54; Kathleen Burk, “The Marshall Plan: Filling in Some of the Blanks,” *Contemporary European History* 10, no. 2 (2001): 267-94. See also Christopher Endy, *Cold War Holidays: American Tourism in France* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2004).



England.<sup>87</sup> The Kremlin seems to have shown little interest in the initiative even if VOKS maintained that it was especially urgent to crush rumors that exaggerated the role of England and the United States in winning the war, while diminishing the accomplishment of the Soviet Union.<sup>88</sup>

In this atmosphere, a high-profile delegation of Soviet writers representing Soviet newspapers visited the United States in 1946 and, as they claimed afterward, “saw America.”<sup>89</sup> Ilya Ehrenburg represented *Izvestiia*, Konstantin Simonov *Krasnaia zvezda* (*Red Star*), and Mikhail Galaktinov *Pravda*. The three arrived as guests of the American Society of Newspaper Editors and were flown to the States via Paris in U.S. Ambassador Walter Bedell Smith’s personal airplane.<sup>90</sup> Issues of censorship and correspondence were dominant during the visit. Attempts by the delegates to represent the Soviet Union as a good place in which to live were overpowered by the American focus on difficulties of traveling to and reporting about the USSR. The American hosts proved a difficult crowd for the Soviets, asking tough questions about working conditions in the Soviet Union and not respecting Soviet social standards on treating guests with respect and sympathy.<sup>91</sup> The delegates were shocked and insulted at the directness with which the American hosts interrogated them about conditions in the Soviet Union, posing such questions, as “what would happen to

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<sup>87</sup>RGASPI, f. 17, op. 125, d. 371, ll. 138-44ob.

<sup>88</sup>RGASPI, f. 17, op. 125, d. 371, l. 143.

<sup>89</sup>Ilya Ehrenburg and his traveling companions published a book with this title after their trip to the United States. See Ilya Ehrenburg, Mikhail Galaktinov, and Konstantin Simonov, *We Have Seen America* (New York: National Council of American-Soviet Friendship, 1946).

<sup>90</sup>David Caute, *The Dancer Defects: The Struggle for Cultural Supremacy During the Cold War* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2003), 89.

<sup>91</sup>*Ibid.*

[them] in case [they] wrote an editorial advocating the removal of Marshal Stalin?”<sup>92</sup> Such famous American commentators on the Soviet Union as American journalist Harrison E. Salisbury angrily noted how the delegation avoided all uncomfortable questions, such as why it was so difficult for American correspondents to get admitted to Russia. Salisbury was even more outraged to find out “that [Konstantin] Simonov came away and wrote a play [*The Russian Question*] about an American correspondent who was able to tour the USSR without the visa issue even being raised.”<sup>93</sup> American journalists were well aware of the difficulties involved with getting a visa to travel to the Soviet Union.

Overall, Moscow considered the trip a success, especially as the writers had been given much space to “tell the truth about the Soviet Union” in front of large crowds in the United States, where they “constantly provoked a variety of questions and friendly feedback.”<sup>94</sup> It is difficult to know what the visitors themselves thought about their America visit but, in line with Soviet official policies, they reported in their newspapers about the horrors of capitalism. They had witnessed both strikes and industrial unrest in major American cities, but they had also been met with incredible displays of friendship. On behalf of the American government, Assistant Secretary of State William Benton offered the Soviet journalists an invitation to travel the country as guests of the United States. They accepted the offer, but insisted on paying all costs. The American government then designed individual itineraries for each of the three guests according to their wishes: Simonov wished to see Hollywood;

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<sup>92</sup>Ibid., 91. See also Ehrenburg, Galaktinov, and Simonov, *We Have Seen America*.

<sup>93</sup>Caute, *The Dancer Defects*, 89.

<sup>94</sup>GARF, f. 5283, op. 22s, d. 581, l. 28.

Galaktinov Chicago; and Ilya Ehrenburg the deep American South.<sup>95</sup> The journalists wrote about their respective experiences for Soviet publications, and even though Ehrenburg allowed himself some optimism in writing about the American South, claiming that “the South is on the threshold of decisive events,”<sup>96</sup> they adhered in most ways to the official Soviet anti-American standards in depicting the United States upon their return.<sup>97</sup>

In 1947, concern about anti-Soviet propaganda in the United States had increased in Moscow, and the American department of VOKS considered several ways to raise interest in the Soviet Union among the American people, especially American intellectuals.<sup>98</sup> Over the next few years, VOKS attempted to counter anti-Soviet propaganda by accepting an invitation to attend the American Cultural and Scientific Conference for World Peace in New York in March 1949.<sup>99</sup> Alexander Fadeev, General Secretary of the Soviet Writers’ Union, Dmitri Shostakovich, composer, and A. I. Oparin, head of the Biological Sciences Section of the Academy of Sciences in the Soviet Union, attended the conference on behalf of the Soviet Union. Their attendance did not come about smoothly. In 1948, in the midst of an attack on “formalist composers” in the Soviet Union, the State Repertoire Commission (Glavrepertkom) removed Shostakovich from his teaching posts at the Leningrad and

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<sup>95</sup>Joshua Rubenstein, *Tangled Loyalties: The Life and Times of Ilya Ehrenburg* (New York: BasicBooks, 1996), 232-33.

<sup>96</sup>Cited in Rubenstein, *Tangled Loyalties*, 238.

<sup>97</sup>Ehrenburg, Galaktinov, and Simonov, *We Have Seen America*.

<sup>98</sup>GARF, f. 5283, op. 22s, d. 590, l. 2.

<sup>99</sup>The American government supported a group of anti-Soviet American writers called “Americans for Intellectual Freedom” in its efforts to disrupt the meeting. Pells, *Not Like Us*, 70. On the secret cultural activities of the American government in western Europe, see Frances Stonor Saunders, *The Cultural Cold War: The CIA and the World of Arts and Letters* (New York: The New Press, 2000).

Moscow conservatories and banned the performance of his works. When Stalin learned of Shostakovich's popularity abroad, he reversed the Glavrepertkom order four days before the delegation was to leave the Soviet Union and encouraged the composer to accept the offer to go to New York.<sup>100</sup> Suslov then gave Shostakovich permission to play for American audiences and address the Congress.<sup>101</sup> During their short stay, the Soviet representatives spoke only of Soviet achievements and dedication to peaceful relations between the two countries. The main goals of the official Soviet mission of spreading the "truth" about the Soviet Union were clearly stated in Fadeev's speech:

The peoples of the Soviet Union stand for peace. It is doubtful whether even one unprejudiced American or Western European could be found, who, coming to our country, would not feel the healthy, peaceful pulse of life in the entire atmosphere; in the plan for the reconstruction of Moscow projected for a period of twenty-five years; in the plans for the planting of forests encompassing the gigantic steppe regions of the European part of the USSR in order to insure a rich harvest; in the experiments of Academician Lysenko for distributing bush-like wheat; in the new productions of the Moscow Art Theater; in the life-loving, optimistic mood of our citizens; in the peaceful tone of the press; in the bright voices of the children—so many of whom are being born in our country, as a sign of the confirmation of life, its most beautiful and most hopeful symbol.<sup>102</sup>

When it became clear that part of the delegation's mission was to malign the United States government, Americans turned increasingly hostile to it: Yale University declined to have Shostakovich perform on campus, and city councils and hotels refused to accommodate the delegation. Instead of allowing the delegation to travel further in the United States, the State

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<sup>100</sup>Caute, *The Dancer Defects*, 420-21.

<sup>101</sup>The Central Committee clearly controlled the themes the delegation was allowed to bring up in the United States. RGASPI, f. 17, op. 132, d. 242, l. 27.

<sup>102</sup>*American and Soviet Leaders meet at the American Cultural and Scientific Conference for World Peace, New York, 1949. Addresses by Fadeyev, Shostakovich, Oparin* (San Francisco: American Russian Institute, 1949), 3.

Department revoked its visas,<sup>103</sup> and this Soviet delegation was the last to visit the U.S. until Stalin's death in 1953.<sup>104</sup>

Few Americans who did not openly sympathize with the Soviet system were invited to visit the Soviet Union during Stalin's last years. The great majority of Americans visiting were in some way connected to the National Council of American Soviet Friendship and thus to the Communist Party of the United States of America.<sup>105</sup> Still, the Soviet government always made an effort to represent the Soviet Union in the most favorable light to those few Americans who did visit. It wanted the visitors to report favorably on their experiences, thus aiding the government in the propaganda war.

In 1947, the Soviet side took a chance on American writer John Steinbeck. Despite Steinbeck's open contempt for the Communist agenda,<sup>106</sup> his 1930s novels, especially the *Grapes of Wrath* (1939), and his earlier visit to the Soviet Union in 1936 gave Soviet authorities reasons to believe that he would not malign the Soviet system or its people. The Soviets were a bit concerned, however, because when Steinbeck and his traveling companion, photographer Robert Capa, were asked what they thought of the American Communist Party, they both called it "a sect that was leading stupid politics." The Soviets also strongly suspected Steinbeck of wanting to respond to Simonov's *The Russian Question*

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<sup>103</sup>J. D. Parks, *Culture, Conflict, and Coexistence: American-Soviet Cultural Relations, 1917-1958* (London: McFarland, 1983), 127.

<sup>104</sup>J. D. Parks recounts how a Soviet chess team of fifteen players visited the United States in May 1953. Parks, *Culture, Conflict and Coexistence*, 138.

<sup>105</sup>GARF, f. 5283, op. 14, d. 573, ll. 1-1a.

<sup>106</sup>Steinbeck, *Russian Journal*, xxi-xxii.

and worried what he might come up with.<sup>107</sup> When Soviet officials inquired about his plans, he claimed that “Americans usually expect the truth from me. I will also tell the truth this time.”<sup>108</sup>

The case of John Steinbeck and his travels in the Soviet Union illustrates well all the concerns the Soviet government had with receiving and entertaining American visitors in the postwar Soviet Union. Traveling to the Soviet Union mainly in order to report on the progress of reconstruction, Steinbeck’s goal was to write on the Soviet system and its people in such a way that mutual fears would be shattered and peaceful relations could be strengthened. Steinbeck enthusiastically described the changes that had taken place since his earlier visit.<sup>109</sup> Steinbeck himself had spent the latter part of the Second World War as the *New York Herald Tribune*’s war correspondent in England, and his travel to the still devastated Soviet Union can be seen as “the final chapter of this war journalism.”<sup>110</sup> The *Herald Tribune* published Steinbeck’s articles in early 1948.<sup>111</sup> The subsequent book, *A Russian Journal*, represents a larger genre, i.e., anthropological memoirs, travelogues, and journalistic accounts written by people who lived in or visited the Soviet Union. Such books

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<sup>107</sup>GARF, f. 5283, op. 22, d. 26, ll. 176-77.

<sup>108</sup>GARF, f. 5283, op. 22, d. 26, ll. 176-77. Here l. 174. GARF, f. 5283, op. 22, d. 26, l. 216. Also cited in Stojko and Serhiuchuk, “J. Steinbeck in Ukraine,” 64.

<sup>109</sup>Both John Steinbeck in *A Russian Journal* and the Soviet documents claim that his first visit took place in 1937. The introduction to *A Russian Journal* refers to his 1936 trip (xxi) but that date is incorrect.

<sup>110</sup>Steinbeck, *Russian Journal*, xii.

<sup>111</sup>Steinbeck and Capa’s “visual record” of their journey was first published early 1948 in the *New York Herald Tribune* and in the *Ladies’ Home Journal*, but *A Russian Journal* was published in book form later that same year. Steinbeck, *Russian Journal*, xvii, xix. The coverage in the *New York Herald Tribune* started on January 14, 1948 and ran on page three until January 31. *Ladies’ Home Journal* published the accounts in February.

were published in the United States throughout the Soviet period, and most of them aimed at getting to know “common people” or to present the “real Soviet Russia” to American readers.

The Soviet authorities went through great effort to stage socialist life because they wanted their visitors to report favorably about their experiences. Foreign visitors to the Soviet Union, especially in the postwar period when large areas that had seen much destruction were closed off to foreigners, were presented with a showcased reality.<sup>112</sup> In 1948, however, Soviet émigrés reprimanded Steinbeck for not trying to see what was behind the façade.<sup>113</sup> Steinbeck’s refusal to look deeper was made all the worse by the fact that, in the fall of 1947, Ukraine was just beginning to recover from the famine that plagued the countryside in 1946-47. Therefore, Steinbeck’s reports from Shevchenko I, a Ukrainian collective farm, outraged émigrés who claimed to know the truth of the situation. Steinbeck, however, who wrote about the show that the farm population put on, saw in it nothing more than hospitality: “The people in this village did put on a show for us. They put on the same kind of show a Kansas farmer would put on for a guest. They did the same thing that our people do, so that Europeans say ‘The Americans live on chicken.’”<sup>114</sup> The value of Steinbeck’s observations, however, lies not in his “objective” reporting but in his interactions as an American celebrity with Soviet people and his struggle to correct what he deemed inaccurate or false ideas about the United States. In that sense, John Steinbeck was an important representative of the

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<sup>112</sup>It was not until after Stalin’s death, in 1953, that Kremlin felt it could begin to display certain elements of Soviet life.

<sup>113</sup>Yuriy Sherekh, “Why Did You Not Want To See, Mr. Steinbeck?” *Ukrainian Quarterly* 4 (1948): 317-24.

<sup>114</sup>Steinbeck, *Russian Journal*, 78.

United States, causing people, such as little Grisha in Ukraine, to cry out in wonder “But these Americans are people just like us!”<sup>115</sup>

There are several instances in *A Russian Journal* where Steinbeck refers to popular interest in the United States, recounting how collective farmers, office bureaucrats, writers, and intellectuals expressed curiosity about the American people and their government. Steinbeck fielded questions about everything from America’s agriculture to its structure of government: “they asked about wages, and standards of living, and the kind of life a workingman lives, and did the average man have an automobile, and what kind of house does he live in, and did his children go to school, and what kind of school.”<sup>116</sup> People often expressed their fear of war and an American attack on the Soviet Union in conversations with Steinbeck and Capa:<sup>117</sup> “Will the United States attack us? Will we have to defend our country again in one lifetime?”<sup>118</sup> Yet memories of the American wartime alliance remained strong, and President Franklin Delano Roosevelt remained a hero in the Soviet Union.<sup>119</sup> The combination of widespread fear of a renewed war and the fresh memory of the American ally often contributed to favorable attitudes toward the American people and disbelief in American motives for fighting the Soviet Union. The anti-American campaign had already started, however, and people were wary of expressing fondness for American culture and

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<sup>115</sup>Ibid., 74.

<sup>116</sup>Ibid., 54-55.

<sup>117</sup>These reports apparently came from Soviet journalists monitoring the American media and interpreting it in such a way that Americans were gearing up for another war. The rumor about a new war, this time between the United States and the Soviet Union, was nearly as old as victory in the Great Patriotic War.

<sup>118</sup>Steinbeck, *A Russian Journal*, 55.

<sup>119</sup>Ibid., 102.



values. Steinbeck concluded that the Soviet people in general had “a great deal of misinformation about America.”<sup>120</sup> He observed that the general disposition toward the United States and particularly toward Americans was friendly, but claimed that common knowledge about America was not deep. Slowly, he and Capa “began to realize that America is a very difficult country to explain.”<sup>121</sup>

Soviet authorities similarly tried to correctly “explain” their country to the foreign guests, and in order to further shape Steinbeck and Capa’s work, the Soviet guides who shepherded them on their travels drew personal profiles of their visitors, estimating what they would write about and photograph in the Soviet Union. Their guide in Ukraine, Potoratsky, the deputy chairman of the Ukrainian Society for Cultural Relations with Foreign Countries (UOKS) concluded that their perceptions could harm the Soviet cause. Every effort had to be made to prevent them from “incorrectly explaining” the Soviet Union:

Steinbeck is a man of conservative conviction and, in addition, he has recently become more right-wing oriented. That’s why our approach to him should be especially cautious and we should avoid showing him something that can do us any harm. Capa, the photographer accompanying him, also needs to be watched to prevent him from taking pictures of what he shouldn’t. The number of Steinbeck’s questions should be limited and if need be, we must argue or even quarrel with him.<sup>122</sup>

Generally, Soviet officials hoped that Khmarsky, who accompanied Steinbeck and Capa on their travels, was right when he claimed that “Steinbeck will evaluate the Soviet people favorably and will emphasize its sympathy for the American people. He will describe to some extent the ruin and will positively evaluate the heroic work of the Soviet Ukrainian

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<sup>120</sup>Ibid., 56.

<sup>121</sup>Ibid., 54.

<sup>122</sup>Wolodymyr Stojko and Wolodymyr Serhiychuk, “J. Steinbeck in Ukraine: What the Secret Soviet Archives Reveal” *The Ukrainian Quarterly* 51, no. 1 (1995): 62-76. Here p. 64.

people.”<sup>123</sup> They saw the closely monitored photographs captured by Capa as an indicator of the topics Steinbeck would write about. According to Kharmsky, Capa was sensitive when evaluating what to photograph:

I was with Capa when he took all of his pictures. He had an opportunity to take pictures depicting beggars, queues, German prisoners of war, and secret sites (i.e., the construction of the gas pipe-line). He did not take photos of this kind and approached his photography without reporter imprudence. I can point to only two photos, which cannot be considered favorably: in the Museum of Ukrainian Art, he took a picture of an emaciated woman-visitor, and on our way to the kolkhoz, he took a picture of a kolkhoz family wearing shabby clothes; all of them including teenagers, were pumping water.<sup>124</sup>

The Soviets concluded that Capa, who they generally considered more open and talkative, was “more loyal and friendly disposed to us.” They worried that Steinbeck, “in an underhanded way,” encouraged Capa to photograph “vulnerable” aspects of Soviet life.<sup>125</sup> Another worry was that even though the book would favorably depict everyday life in the Soviet Union, the authors would parrot American propaganda and unfavorably compare Soviet and American societies.<sup>126</sup>

The Soviet guides correctly judged that Steinbeck was impressed with such interest in the American people, but they were not so certain whether Steinbeck believed that the Soviet people honestly wanted the Soviet and American governments to work together:

All comrades Steinbeck met with emphasized their favorable attitude toward the American people, which pleased Steinbeck, and he was sure that those repeated

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<sup>123</sup>GARF, f. 5283, op. 22, d. 26, l. 219. Also cited in Stojko and Serhiuchuk, “J. Steinbeck in Ukraine,” 67.

<sup>124</sup>GARF, f. 5283, op. 22, d. 26, ll. 216-21. Khmarsky was careful enough to state that “the sense of any photo, of course, can lead to a critical opinion” (l. 220). Stojko and Serhiuchuk, “J. Steinbeck in Ukraine,” 68 also cite this episode.

<sup>125</sup>GARF, f. 5283, op. 22, d. 26, ll. 216-21. See also discussion of Capa’s photos in GARF, f. 5283, op. 22, d. 26, l. 221 and Stojko and Serhiuchuk, “J. Steinbeck in Ukraine,” 68.

<sup>126</sup>GARF, f. 5283, op. 22, d. 26, ll. 219-20 and Stojko and Serhiuchuk, “J. Steinbeck in Ukraine,” 67.

expressions were true. As for the expressions made by our comrades about the unity of the people and government of the USSR, and that there are no sentiments in the USSR directed against the American people—these comments did not find any success since Steinbeck and Capa considered them ‘propaganda’ and avoided discussions on this topic.<sup>127</sup>

After *A Russian Journal* came out, Soviet authorities finally decided that the Steinbeck-Capa visit had not been a success. Khmarsky, scrambling to redeem his formerly positive evaluation of Steinbeck’s goals, now wrote a letter to the main editor of *Literaturnaia gazeta*, V. Ermilov, claiming that most of Steinbeck’s conversations with Soviet citizens were conducted while drinking: “his drinking seems to be a weakness.”<sup>128</sup> John Steinbeck had failed to reach “correct conclusions” about the Soviet Union, and the only answer Soviet authorities had left was to discredit him, claiming he had been drunk the whole time and unable to “correctly” evaluate Soviet socialism. Steinbeck was unhappy with the Soviet reception of the book, especially a review published in *Izvestiia* that characterized him as having “sold out” to his bosses, as opposed to “good American” Harry Smith from Simonov’s *A Russian Question*.<sup>129</sup> After careful evaluation of the American media, however, Soviet analysts concluded that “Steinbeck—the author of the *Grapes of Wrath*—had long ago joined the ranks of writers who defend capitalism.”<sup>130</sup>

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<sup>127</sup>Cited in Stojko and Serhiuchuk, “J. Steinbeck in Ukraine,” 66. See also GARF, f. 5283, op. 22, d. 26, l. 218.

<sup>128</sup>GARF, f. 5283, op. 22, d. 81, ll. 190-190ob, 191. Here l. 190.

<sup>129</sup>GARF, f. 5283, op. 22, d. 82, ll. 54-64. See also Caute, *The Dancer Defects*, 112. Steinbeck’s *A Russian Journal* was controversial in the United States as well. People saw in it what they wanted to see and some saw it as pro-communist, while others saw it as anti-Soviet.

<sup>130</sup>GARF, f. 5283, op. 22, d. 82, l. 64. Steinbeck went to the Soviet Union yet again in 1963 as part of the now official exchange programs. Although he had fallen out of favor after *A Russian Journal*, *The Winter of Our Discontent* put him back on the map as a “progressive writer” in the Soviet Union. In 1963, Steinbeck was prepared by the US State Department on which writers he should try to contact and talk to and his own personal

Steinbeck's experiences, in what was surely the most high-profile and prominent American cultural visit to the Soviet Union in the immediate postwar period,<sup>131</sup> showed that Soviet officials went to great lengths in trying to control and monitor their guests' experiences. This ranged from staging prosperity and success in reconstruction in areas still devastated from the war, to choosing and preparing the people who talked to both Steinbeck and Capa. Soviet authorities realized quite well that a respected writer and war journalist such as Steinbeck had the potential to reach a large audience with his writings, and they hoped that he would report favorably on the Soviet Union. They took a chance on Steinbeck and, in spite of their efforts to show him only a staged socialist reality, his observations did the Soviet cause more harm than good.

## Conclusion

During the late Stalin period, the Soviet Union proved incapable maintaining open cultural relations with the United States, and thus superpower relations boiled down to a propaganda war. The Soviet effort, however, was mostly spent on limiting the effects of Americans and American propaganda: from the beginning, the Soviet cultural front was on the defensive in the propaganda war against the various voices of America. Soviet authorities found themselves under siege on almost all fronts: they were not reaching American audiences, they did not fully take advantage of opportunities to expose American propaganda in the

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mission was "raise as much fuss as possible about the Russian piracy of Western books." Jackson J. Benson, *The True Adventures of John Steinbeck, Writer* (New York: The Viking Press, 1984), 926-33. Quote on p. 930.

<sup>131</sup>GARF, f. 5283, op. 22, d. 26, l. 177.

Soviet Union, and their most high-profile visit in the period, the Steinbeck-Capa trip, proved counterproductive in advancing their propaganda mission.

On top of all this, they needed to help their own people understand and interpret the lies being presented to them in American propaganda. Soviet authorities were anxious about the foreign radio broadcasts and the distribution of foreign publications, such as the journal *Amerika*, among the Soviet public because American propaganda contributed to the making of a counter-myth that judged the internal propaganda to be invalid because it was so far removed from people's everyday experiences. While it is impossible to determine how many people read *Amerika* or listened to American radio broadcasts, the official reaction to these media and their efforts in trying to limit and eliminate them speak volumes about the perceived impact of American propaganda in the Soviet Union.

Presenting their own version of a Soviet reality to both domestic and American audiences, the authorities did not realize that conditions beyond their control, such as McCarthyism, were not solely to blame for their struggles. The inherent failure in their mission lay in the fact that their message of peace and prosperity was flawed and the appeal of the American message was stronger. Showcasing a Soviet reality while signaling that the American propaganda message was harming them sent out the wrong message to both domestic and international audiences. Stalin's Soviet Union was neither ready to be opened to the close scrutiny of international audiences in the postwar years nor able to counter American propaganda. In the aftermath of war, Soviet authorities feared losing the loyalty of the Soviet people: their strategy was to limit and control contact with foreigners and information about the outside world as much as possible.

## Chapter 4

### **Mission Impossible? Telling the Truth About Soviet Socialism, 1955-58**

The last years under Stalin had seen very limited cultural contacts with the United States but only two years after the dictator had passed away, the Soviet All-Union Society for Cultural Relations with Foreign Countries (VOKS) concluded that the year 1955 had “marked the revival of Soviet-American cultural exchanges.”<sup>1</sup> The year 1955 saw several mutual exchanges of delegations and a growing number of American tourists in the Soviet Union—who “in many cases were useful in spreading true information about our country in the United States.” To this effect, the Soviet side was pleased to note the “steadily rising interest of American society in the life and culture of the Soviet people” and mainly credited this growing interest to the recent success of Soviet cultural organizations and their work with individual American citizens.<sup>2</sup>

Owing to the changed atmosphere in the wake of Stalin’s death, collaboration on the cultural stage became possible. Under Khrushchev, the mission of representing the Soviet Union and thereby fighting American propaganda in principle remained the same, but cultural relations became more numerous and open. With the increased openness, however, the Soviet side found itself struggling to find a balance between the possibility of growing

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<sup>1</sup>GARF, f. 5283, op. 14, d. 577, l. 169.

<sup>2</sup>GARF, f. 5283, op. 14, d. 577, ll. 169-71.

cooperation with the United States and the mission of “telling the truth” about the Soviet Union, that is, of conveying a favorable image of itself to foreign, especially American, audiences. The changes began in the summer of 1955, when President Dwight D. Eisenhower, British Prime Minister Anthony Eden, French Prime Minister Guy Mollet, and Khrushchev met in Geneva to discuss the problematic German question. Even though the discussions did not produce expected results, both the Soviet and the American sides made hesitant reconciliation efforts. In addition, several high profile delegations visited each country and, by the end of the year, the cast of *Porgy and Bess* became the first American theater group to travel to the Soviet Union. Starting in 1955, Soviet authorities seemed honest in their efforts of wanting to get to know the American enemy better.

This chapter examines Soviet-American relations from the revival of cultural relations in 1955 until the signing of an official exchange agreement between the superpowers in 1958. The story is told from the viewpoint of Soviet cultural organizations involved in the mission of representing the Soviet Union to Americans. It takes into account perceptions and experiences of both Soviet and American participants in Soviet-American cultural relations. In the mid-1950s, Soviet participants in the Soviet-American propaganda war admitted that their flawed mission needed to be improved. However, the Soviet side revealed its vulnerability as it attempted to reconcile the increased exposure to the West with social control in the Soviet Union.

### **The Spirit of Geneva and the Legacy of 1955**

In May 1955, West Germany was incorporated into NATO, the Soviet Union initiated the Warsaw Pact alliance as a response, and it seemed like the German Question would continue

to divide the two superpowers.<sup>3</sup> Khrushchev, however, had started advocating for peaceful coexistence with the West, calling on the United States to show that it was ready to give peace a chance. The Geneva Summit, which took place in the summer of 1955, turned out to be important for future developments in Soviet-American relations. In terms of hard agreements, the leaders did not accomplish much, but the summit did open up a dialogue that helped to reduce tensions between East and West.<sup>4</sup> The “spirit of Geneva” contributed to the loosening up of official relations. Although the invasion of Hungary in November 1956 caused a setback, too much was at stake to allow the revival of friendly relations to completely die out.<sup>5</sup>

The “spirit of Geneva” thus paved the way for a 1956 official agreement on the renewed circulation of *Amerika* in the Soviet Union and of *USSR* in the United States.<sup>6</sup> The Central Committee announced that, as of October 22, 1956, *Amerika* would again be distributed in eighty-four cities in the Soviet Union. Simultaneously, *USSR* would go on newsstands across the United States. Fifty-thousand copies of *Amerika* went on sale,<sup>7</sup> and the American

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<sup>3</sup>Walter L. Hixson, *Parting the Curtain: Propaganda, Culture, and the Cold War, 1945-1961* (New York: St. Martin's Press, 1998), 95-96.

<sup>4</sup>For more on the 1955 Geneva Summit, see Richard Crockatt's *The Fifty Years War: The United States and the Soviet Union in World Politics, 1941-1991* (London and New York: Routledge, 1995), 125-29. With the Federal Republic of Germany admitted into NATO in May 1955, the German question was a major issue at the meeting. For a view on the summit and its cultural context see J. D. Parks, *Culture, Conflict, and Coexistence: American-Soviet Cultural Relations, 1917-1958* (London: McFarland, 1983), 146-55.

<sup>5</sup>Hixson, *Parting the Curtain*, 109.

<sup>6</sup>*Ibid.*, 117.

<sup>7</sup>Rossiiskii gosudarstvennyi arkhiv noveishei istorii, hereafter RGANI, f. 5, op. 33, d. 16, l. 72.



Embassy in Moscow had the right to distribute freely two thousand copies of the journal as it saw fit.<sup>8</sup>

Seemingly more tolerant than they had been only five years earlier, Soviet authorities still saw the legal publication as a threat to socialist values, using possession of *Amerika* against some of its citizens. Such was the case of Viktor Mikhailovich Lukin, born in 1930 close to Tver. He joined the army young and served in Moscow, but after Stalin died, he moved to Barnaul where he started studying at the Agricultural Institute. He got married to a fellow student. They shared the same values, read a lot, went to the movies, and actively participated in student life.<sup>9</sup> In his autobiography, he wrote how “everything was coming together nicer than it ever had,” but “then came 1956, the year of the ‘historic’ Twentieth Congress of the KPSS.” Viktor Mikhailovich described how in 1956 students began exchanging their opinions about domestic and international events. He was often vocal at student gatherings, advocating for a better dormitory and a student cafeteria, and criticizing the authorities for inertia and deception. The atmosphere of 1956 clearly opened up possibilities for the Soviet people to express themselves more, and universities and academic institutions provided fertile grounds for such discussions.

Viktor Lukhin, however, was arrested on March 9, 1957, for anti-Soviet behavior on the grounds that for two years, from 1955 to 1957, he had actively spread anti-Soviet propaganda. He was accused of having both verbally slandered the Soviet leadership and of spreading anti-Soviet brochures maligning the Soviet leadership and the Communist Party’s

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<sup>8</sup>RGANI, f. 5, op. 33, d. 16, l. 73.

<sup>9</sup>Viktor Mikhailovich Lukhin’s unpublished memoir is available in the Memorial’ archive. It is without a title and as of December 2003 not cataloged. I am indebted to the archivists at Memorial’ for allowing me to read the manuscript.

international and domestic politics. Allegedly, he had also praised the quality of life and the “political order” in capitalist countries.<sup>10</sup> During a search, the police also found two issues of the journal *Amerika*, and on one of them he had written: “I bought this with the last money I had but I feel happy.”<sup>11</sup> The police alleged that, in conversations with students, he praised American freedom of the press while pointing out that the Soviet media never published critical articles, and “if such an article appeared, its author would end up in prison and maybe even dead.”<sup>12</sup>

Lukhin’s case is especially interesting since he wrote (an unpublished) memoir of these events. In the 1990s, Lukhin became an intrepid advocate for repressed Soviet citizens and wanted the stories of repression not to be forgotten. In his autobiography, he recounts how he had indeed bought the magazines, but he emphasizes how they were legally sold in kiosks. According to his account, the police were concerned that he had taken *Amerika* to his institute, showing it to students and “maligning Soviet realities while praising the economic and political quality of life of the American people.” His interrogators were also interested in his anti-Soviet views on the events in Hungary. In the wake of the 1956 Twentieth Party Congress, Viktor Lukhin had become something of a student activist, and this could have been enough to put him on the radar screen of Soviet security organs. But it is fascinating how prominent a role the journal *Amerika* played in both his own writings and in the files of the Soviet procuracy. By reading the journal, showing it to students, and, allegedly, complaining about student life in the Soviet Union while praising the life of students in

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<sup>10</sup>Gosudarstvennyi Arkhiv Rossiiskoi Federatsii, hereafter GARF, f. 8131, op. 31, d. 84691, l. 1.

<sup>11</sup>GARF, f. 8131, op. 31, d. 84691, l. 3.

<sup>12</sup>Ibid.

England and America, he only added to the police's suspicion of him as an anti-Soviet citizen. He repeatedly claimed that it was legal to buy the journal; he did not own up to having committed any anti-Soviet crime.<sup>13</sup>

Viktor Lukhin's story shows that despite Soviet willingness to open up to the outside world, the authorities were still uncertain how much freedom of information they were willing to tolerate inside the Soviet Union. It was not easy for them to walk the thin line between advocating for peaceful coexistence and arresting citizens for anti-Soviet behavior when they took advantage of available, legal information about the outside world. Despite the renewed circulation of *Amerika*, radio remained the main tool Americans had to propagandize in the Soviet Union, and it is telling that although the Soviet government allowed *Amerika* back in circulation, American officials tried to no avail to get the Kremlin to cease jamming VOA broadcast in 1956.<sup>14</sup>

The Khrushchev thaw of the mid to late 1950s left its mark on the domestic organizational structure of cultural relations with foreign countries. Almost immediately after Stalin's death, his heirs in the party created a Department for Ties with Foreign Communist Parties, which took over control of VOKS. This change meant that party control over VOKS was no longer a secret.<sup>15</sup> The atmosphere of the early Khrushchev period also allowed for recognition of the fact that the Soviet strategy of promoting the country and socialist values was not working, that the front organizations were preaching to the converted, and that there

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<sup>13</sup>He wrote about having listened to the Voice of America in his memoir but his procuracy file does not mention it.

<sup>14</sup>Hixson, *Parting the Curtain*, 114.

<sup>15</sup>Nigel Gould-Davies, "The Logic of Soviet Cultural Diplomacy," *Diplomatic History* 27, no. 2 (2003): 193-214. Here p. 203.

was not enough appropriate informational material about the Soviet Union in the United States. Demand for Soviet materials increased in the United States as the McCarthy era came to an end; under Khrushchev, the party became more interested in conducting its mission in the United States forcefully.

This led to a major reorganization of VOKS. During a conference in Moscow on February 17-18, 1958, VOKS was formally abandoned and SSOD, or the Union of Soviet Societies for Friendship and Cultural Relations with Foreign Countries, was formed.<sup>16</sup> The new format assumed that a special friendship society with each country would be established on the Soviet side. Prominent Soviet cultural figures would be in charge of meetings in the Soviet Union. The purpose of this change was to put more weight on domestic work and to counter perceptions of the friendship societies as powerless puppets of the Kremlin catering only to foreign fellow travelers. There was, however, still no such society on the American side and, as of 1957, the newly established East-West Contacts Staff at the American State Department oversaw almost all cultural contacts with the Soviet Union. This rearrangement of international cultural matters on the Soviet side also followed the signing of the official Soviet-American cultural exchange treaty in 1958, which was administered at the state level in both countries.

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<sup>16</sup>S.V. Mironenko, *Fondy Gosudarstvennogo arkhiva Rossiiskoi Federatsii po istorii SSSR*. Vol. 3 (Moscow: Reaktsionno-izdatel'skii otdel federal'nykh arkhivov, 1997), 653. This was how the organizational structure remained on the Soviet side until the end of 1991 when there were 98 friendship societies with peoples of foreign countries. The highest organ of SSOD was the All-Union Conference, which gathered every five years with a presidium in charge in between. Clive Rose, *The Soviet Propaganda Network: A Directory of Organisations Serving Soviet Foreign Policy* (London and New York: Pinter Publishers, St. Martin's Press, 1988), 257. VOKS/SSOD were referred to as 'Public Organisations' (obshchestvennye organizatsii) although they were, of course, wholly party-controlled. SSOD stands for Soiuz sovetskikh obshchestv družby i kul'turnoi svyazei s zarubezhnymi stranami.

Another important change under Khrushchev was the establishment in 1957 of the State Committee for Cultural Relations with Foreign Countries under the aegis of the Council of Ministers.<sup>17</sup> Now an all-union organ took the lead in the area of cultural cooperation with foreign countries, coordinating the activities of ministries and organizations.<sup>18</sup> Frederick C. Barghoorn, then American diplomat and later professor of Political Science at Yale University, has speculated that this change clearly showed how the Soviet side placed increased importance on the issue of cultural relations in Soviet foreign policy. The establishment of a governmental agency on the Soviet side also made it possible for the USSR to deal with Western agencies such as the American State Department's East-West Contacts Staff on an official level.<sup>19</sup> In 1958, with the signing of the Soviet-American cultural exchange treaty, it became clear that this change in the structure had been a necessary step in the process.

Yet another significant change in the Khrushchev era was the comparatively large influx of American culture and literature allowed in the Soviet Union, ranging from public performances such as the staging of *Porgy and Bess* and the standup comedy of Bob Hope to the publication of books by Ernest Hemingway and other American writers. Under

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<sup>17</sup>Komitet po kul'turnym svyaziam s zarubezhnymi stranami pri sovete Ministrov SSSR was established by the Council of Ministers on March 4, 1957, and was active for ten years, until 1967, with former *Pravda* editor Georgii A. Zhukov as its first chairman. This organization was meant to give cultural relations a more official look. See Gould-Davies, "The Logic of Soviet Cultural Diplomacy," 206. See also, Frederick C Barghoorn, *The Soviet Cultural Offensive: The Role of Cultural Diplomacy in Soviet Foreign Policy* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1960), 159.

<sup>18</sup>Mironenko, *Fondy Gosudarstvennogo arkhiva*, 221. The committee was in charge of the Soviet Commission on UNESCO matters and was engaged in international relations at the state level in the area of education, public health, culture, literature, art, and sports and had missions at Soviet embassies abroad.

<sup>19</sup>Barghoorn, *The Soviet Cultural Offensive*, 159-60. Gould-Davies claims that the State Committee was "established as a state body only for external appearances. In reality, it was intended to function as a more powerful department of the Central Committee of the Communist party" Gould-Davies, "The Logic of Soviet Cultural Diplomacy," 206.

Khrushchev, patriotic themes remained a priority in literature and the arts, but the anti-American tone was not as pronounced as it had been under Stalin. The mainstream medium for performance arts also changed from theater to films, and, with the rise of mass culture in the Soviet Union, it became more difficult to promote pure propaganda as entertainment.<sup>20</sup>

Ever since the 1920s, Soviet anti-American propaganda often focused on the problematic “Negro Question,” as it was called in the Soviet Union. With all the emphasis on the “Negro Question,” it is not surprising that in 1955 the cast of *Porgy and Bess* was the first American theatrical group to travel to the Soviet Union.<sup>21</sup> The show was an unequivocal success; thousands of people saw the show, and the Leningrad and Moscow audiences raved about the performance. Those not fortunate enough to get tickets congregated around the theaters.<sup>22</sup> The *Porgy and Bess* visit posed some problems for Soviet authorities, for it was an ambitious project, and the Ministry of Culture, responsible for bringing the *Porgy and Bess* theater company, Everyman Opera, Inc., to the Soviet Union, provided musicians, a grand piano, and paid thousands of dollars to the company for the show.<sup>23</sup> The main problem, however, was keeping track of the cast, who refused to spend their free time in group activities and wandered off on their own. An unidentified American Communist Party member told VOKS

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<sup>20</sup>For the rise of mass culture in the Soviet Union see Kristin Joy Roth-Ey, “Mass Media and the Remaking of Soviet Culture, 1950s-1960s,” (Ph.D. diss., Princeton University, 2003). In the 1960s and 1970s, the theater became a medium for progressive ideas that did not make it to the media. Anatoly Smelianskiy, *The Russian Theatre After Stalin* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1999), xvi.

<sup>21</sup>In April 1946, the State Academic Opera Theater (Gosudarstvennyi Akademicheskii Maliy Opernyi teatr) in Leningrad had asked for VOKS’s assistance in acquiring the music sheets for George Gershwin’s *Porgy and Bess*. The American Informational in Moscow announced, that in order to protect the copyright of the author, the score could not be released. GARF, f. 5283, op. 22, d. 14, l. 157.

<sup>22</sup>Hollis Alpert, *The Life and Times of Porgy and Bess: The Story of an American Classic* (New York: Knopf : Distributed by Random House, 1990), 237.

<sup>23</sup>Alpert, *The Life and Times of Porgy and Bess*, 217.

in 1956 that, given the problems a large troupe such as that of *Porgy and Bess* posed, he would recommend inviting American soloists rather than such sizable groups to the Soviet Union.<sup>24</sup>

Throughout the 1950s, Soviet anti-American propaganda got incredibly rich materials about the “Negro Question” straight from the United States. Certainly, American propaganda tried to address racial issues in ways that would not be harmful to the U.S., but the Soviets were more interested in presenting the story from the African-American viewpoint. The American civil rights movement and its struggles made it easy for the Soviet press to manipulate stories of oppression as African-Americans sought to participate in American society on an equal basis. The most dramatic moments of desegregation offered the Soviet side great propaganda opportunities.<sup>25</sup> As Khrushchev’s peaceful coexistence really took off, it replaced Soviet talk of “self-determination” for African-Americans. Yet newspapers took full advantage of stories such as the forced school desegregation in Little Rock, Arkansas, in 1957, repeatedly offering cartoons featuring the Ku Klux Klan and its members.<sup>26</sup>

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<sup>24</sup>GARF, f. 5283, op. 2, d. 532, l. 28. See also David Monod, “Disguise, Containment and the *Porgy and Bess* Revival of 1952-1956,” *Journal of American Studies* 35 (2001): 275-312; also David Monod, “‘He is a Cripple and Needs My Love’: *Porgy and Bess* as Cold War Propaganda” in *The Cultural Cold War in Western Europe, 1945-1960*. Editors Giles Scott-Smith and Hans Krabbendam. Foreword by David Caute. *The Cultural Cold War in Western Europe, 1945-1960* (London: Frank Cass Publishers, 2003): 300-12. J.H. Taylor, “From Catfish Row to Red Square: *Porgy and Bess* and the Politics of the Cold War,” *Theatre InSight* 7, no. 1 (1996): 29-35.

<sup>25</sup>Allison Blakely suggests that in the 1960s, Soviet writings about the “Negro Question” and American history became more sophisticated. Even if Soviet propaganda authorities were slow in realizing this, in the end they adapted their discourse about “the Negro Question” to the achievements of the American civil rights movement. Allison Blakely, *Russia and the Negro: Blacks in Russian History and Thought* (Washington, DC: Howard University Press, 1986), 118.

<sup>26</sup>Blakely, *Russia and the Negro*, 118.

Later in 1957, George Allen, the director of the United States Information Agency, confirmed that Americans were deeply concerned about the one-sided and biased information the Soviet people received about the United States, emphasizing the importance of allowing the Voice of America to get through and stressing that the USIA was willing to “change the tone of the American propaganda.”<sup>27</sup> At this time, the Soviet side was starting to show some tolerance for the availability of American propaganda in the Soviet Union and even allowed a Saturday evening program, “Life in America,” to be broadcast, since it concluded that the show’s stories about quotidian American life were harmless.<sup>28</sup> In cooperation with the State Committee of Cultural Relations, the KGB declared that “Life in America” did not contain direct anti-Soviet propaganda and could thus be broadcast, even though it sometimes “takes on a provocative character.”<sup>29</sup>

The Soviets discussed how they would “silence” the program if it took on an anti-Soviet character.<sup>30</sup> A. Romanov, director of the department for propaganda and agitation in the republics, recommended, however, that the Soviet Union reciprocate with a similar show.<sup>31</sup> The State Committee on Cultural Relations decided to launch a Soviet counterpart, “Life in the USSR,” and broadcast it to America. It was also sixty minutes long and also planned for prime time Saturday broadcasts; the State Committee’s chairman, Georgii A. Zhukov, said

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<sup>27</sup>RGANI, f. 5, op. 33, d. 72, ll. 2-4. In 1958, the Voice of America broadcast in Russian to the Soviet Union for twenty-two hours a week. RGANI, f. 5, op. 33, d. 75, l. 94.

<sup>28</sup>RGANI, f. 5, op. 33, d. 75, ll. 2-12.

<sup>29</sup>RGANI, f. 5, op. 33, d. 75, l. 97.

<sup>30</sup>RGANI, f. 5, op. 33, d. 75, l. 94.

<sup>31</sup>RGANI, f. 5, op. 33, d. 75, l. 97.



that it would be done “the way the USA does this in their special broadcast ‘Life of America.’”<sup>32</sup> In line with the increased cultural cooperation, A. N. Kuznetsov, a director at the State Committee for Cultural Relations with Foreign Countries, accepted an invitation in late December 1957 to visit the Voice of America offices in Washington and learn about the operation. The American side emphasized that Radio Moscow was easily heard in Washington, implicitly expressing hope that the jamming of VOA would cease in the Soviet Union.<sup>33</sup> The Soviet side showed some lenience in jamming and did, for example, discontinue jamming the Voice of America for the duration of Khrushchev’s America visit in 1959. It was, however, slowly admitting that, in reality, jamming was not very effective in stopping foreign radio broadcasts from reaching the Soviet public.

The radio broadcasting system in the Soviet Union, wired versus wireless systems, dictated that those with a wired set could listen only to domestic radio but wireless sets, included short-wave radios, received foreign radio broadcasts. In the 1950s, Soviet production and ownership of short-wave radios increased multifold and almost reached the ownership of wired radios.<sup>34</sup> In 1958, the Central Committee estimated that more than 20 million short-wave radios were in circulation in the Soviet Union (as opposed to up to 200,000 before the war and 500,000 in 1949). The Central Committee continued to view foreign broadcasts, especially the VOA, as bearers of “hostile ideology,” especially as it estimated that 85 percent of all short-wave radios were in the European part of the Soviet Union, where “our own broadcasts cannot be heard on short-wave and people can only listen

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<sup>32</sup>RGANI, f. 5, op. 33, d. 75, l. 95.

<sup>33</sup>GARF, f. 9518, op. 1, d. 346, ll. 124-25.

<sup>34</sup>Roth-Ey, “Mass Media and the Remaking of Soviet Culture,” 251-52.

to enemy radio.”<sup>35</sup> Jamming, they said was not very effective: “Hostile radio can be heard all over the country, with the exception of the centers of Moscow, Leningrad, Kiev, Riga,” and “even in separate areas of Moscow, Leningrad, Kiev and in their suburbs, the broadcasts of BBC, the Voice of America, and others are audible.”<sup>36</sup> Apparently, enemy radio broadcasts were received all over the Soviet Union in spite of the costly jamming. Not only did jamming damage the Soviet image abroad as it so strongly suggested that it feared the “hostile” broadcasts, but it also seemed to be useless in reaching its ultimate goal of preventing Soviet audiences from listening to foreign radio propaganda.<sup>37</sup>

Soviet authorities were still trying to control and limit the effects of American propaganda in the Soviet Union, but compared to the Stalin era, much more information about the outside world was now available. Not only was jamming seemingly useless in preventing foreign radio broadcasts from reaching Soviet audiences, but the legal publication of the journal *Amerika* continued to worry Soviet authorities, especially as their own journal *USSR*, distributed in the United States, did not live up to their expectations. This confusion about just how much outside information to tolerate is also mirrored in the reorganization of cultural organizations Khrushchev undertook. By 1955, the spirit of Geneva, however, contributed to Khrushchev’s relative openness in wanting relations with the United States and the hesitant reconciliation that would follow throughout the rest of the 1950s.

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<sup>35</sup>RGANI, f. 5, op. 33, d. 75, l. 165.

<sup>36</sup>RGANI, f. 5, op. 33, d. 75, l. 164.

<sup>37</sup>Nevertheless, Soviet cultural organizations continued to monitor and analyze the contents of the programs. See, for example, a description of VOA programs from January 26-February 1, 1959. GARF, f. 9518, op. 1, d. 592, ll. 52-59.

## **The Revival of Soviet-American Cultural Relations**

The 1955 revival of Soviet-American cultural exchanges was most noticeable in several high-profile delegations.<sup>38</sup> A Soviet agricultural delegation visited the United States in midsummer, and in late fall a delegation of journalists traveled “from ocean to ocean” to the United States. The agricultural delegation indicated that the U.S. was once more a model for industrial and agricultural technologies. The prominent Moscow journalists familiarized themselves with all aspects of print media, radio, and television in rural settings and urban areas. In addition, however, to presenting developments in their respective professional fields, both delegations were charged with the task of spreading “true information about the Soviet Union” among Americans.<sup>39</sup>

The Soviet visitors received strict directives from the Communist Party on how to behave and how to present Soviet socialism. Overall, the Soviet authorities were “pleased with the positive treatment” and the media coverage the delegation got in the United States.<sup>40</sup> VOKS representatives attributed the positive treatment of the Soviet guests both to increased interaction with Americans and better informational materials about the Soviet Union.<sup>41</sup> The American people met the agricultural delegation with “warmth and hospitality” and the delegates “found great sympathy among ‘ordinary Americans’ toward the Soviet country and

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<sup>38</sup>GARF, f. 5283, op. 14, d. 577, l. 169.

<sup>39</sup>J. D. Parks also notes that the year 1955 was “pivotal” in American-Soviet cultural relations because it saw a growing numbers of Americans traveling to Moscow. J. D. Parks, *Culture, Conflict, and Coexistence*, 139.

<sup>40</sup>GARF, f. 5283, op. 14, d. 577, l. 169.

<sup>41</sup>GARF, f. 5283, op. 14, d. 577, ll. 169-71.

the Soviet people.”<sup>42</sup> American networks aired footage about the Soviet journalists; they were recognized and greeted on the streets, where ordinary people “stopped the cars of the Soviet journalists in order to shake their hands and invite them to their homes.”<sup>43</sup> Both the Soviet and American media provided much coverage of the visits, and the tangible optimism on all levels bore witness to the rekindled energy of Soviet-American cultural relations.

In the United States and Canada from July 16 to August 25, 1955,<sup>44</sup> the Soviet agricultural delegation visited many American cities, familiarized themselves with dozens of farms, visited exhibits, machine manufacturers, colleges, and universities. Furthermore, they met with farmers, agronomists, and business people. Everyone showed polite interest in Soviet agriculture, expressing a desire to exchange experience between the two countries in the agricultural sector.<sup>45</sup> The empty talk about peace and friendship between the nations took on a new form when agricultural progress and sharing of information became a means to reach these goals. As Khrushchev later liked to repeat: “How much nicer it is to speak of corn than arms.”<sup>46</sup> Repeatedly, the delegates confirmed the success of “talking about corn” in the form of personal exchanges. They had traveled to places where “no Soviet person ever

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<sup>42</sup>V. Matskevich, *Chto my videli v SShA i Kanade* (Moscow: Gosudarstvennoe izdatel'stvo politicheskoi literatury, 1956), 3. The book was published in 200,000 copies.

<sup>43</sup>GARF, f. 5283, op. 14, d. 577, l. 169.

<sup>44</sup>An American agricultural delegation visited the USSR at the same time and both reported that their delegations had been met with much goodwill on the other side. Matskevich, *Chto my videli*, 3.

<sup>45</sup>Matskevich, *Chto my videli*, 4.

<sup>46</sup>Quoted from an interview with William Randolph Hearst in Moscow, November 2, 1957. GARF, f. 5283, op. 14, d. 622, l. 253. Adlai Stevenson, who met with Khrushchev in 1958, “mentioned talking about corn and drinking brandy with Mr. Garst of Iowa in the Crimea and what an agreeable and profitable experience it had been.” Roswell Garst, a hybrid corn producer of Coon Rapids, Iowa, visited Khrushchev in 1955 as a part of the American agricultural delegation. See Adlai E. Stevenson, *Friends and Enemies: What I Learned in Russia* (New York: Harper & Brothers Publishers, 1958), p. 14.

visited before,”<sup>47</sup> Americans “tried to grab them” in excitement and claimed that American slander about the Soviet system only made them more interested in learning the truth about the Soviet people.<sup>48</sup> The Soviet delegates repeatedly reminded Americans that the Soviet people did not want war and were “fighting for peace.”<sup>49</sup>

Like other Soviet visitors and intellectuals who traveled abroad, the agricultural delegation wrote lengthy accounts of its travels upon their return. Its leader, V. Matskevich, published a book about the “many valuable things”<sup>50</sup> the delegation had seen in North America. The book was overall very positively disposed toward American agriculture and the general hospitality with which the Americans greeted the delegation, but, predictably, descriptions of American hospitality and friendliness are countered with similar stories of the satisfaction of the American delegates who visited the Soviet Union. Of course, the American agricultural delegation, which came to the Soviet Union in 1955, had also seen many “fruitful and interesting things in the Soviet Union.”<sup>51</sup>

All of this was in line with the “spirit of Geneva” and with Soviet propaganda about how the Soviet Union and the United States, “the most developed agricultural industrial countries in the world,” would be much better off if they cooperated.<sup>52</sup> Matskevich acknowledged that the United States was a step ahead in industrial production; “the USSR comes in second after

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<sup>47</sup>Matskevich, *Chto my videli*, 228.

<sup>48</sup>*Ibid.*, 227 and 228.

<sup>49</sup>*Ibid.*, 239.

<sup>50</sup>*Ibid.*, 4.

<sup>51</sup>Matskevich, *Chto my videli*, 4.

<sup>52</sup>*Ibid.*, 4.

the USA,” but “with the speed of our growth, our country soon will leave the United States behind. Our planned national economy is, contrary to the U.S. economy, without crises and unemployment.”<sup>53</sup> Matskevich made hardly any references to social conditions in the United States, focusing strictly on agricultural production and technology.<sup>54</sup> Americans had, of course, also shown much interest in Soviet agriculture. Matskevich claimed that the delegates had used every opportunity to “correct lies about the Soviet people, and to tell the truth about their goals, struggles, and expectations. We spoke of peace, about mutual understanding, about friendship, the foundation of mutual respect.”<sup>55</sup>

Given Khrushchev’s personal interest in agriculture and his commitment to increase corn production in the Soviet Union, it is no wonder that, in this case, he was interested in hearing what the delegation had learned about agricultural practices in the United States. On October 4, 1955, Khrushchev personally met with the delegation, asking several questions about what they had seen in America. He was interested in anything from detailed descriptions of American facilities and tractors to information about American strategies for growing corn, and the delegates answered all his questions in detail.<sup>56</sup> Khrushchev had himself hosted the American agricultural delegation in the Crimea, taking a personal interest in this issue. This shows that even if the official Soviet mission was to promote friendlier relations with the United States, the Soviet side was also keen on learning from the American other. The

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<sup>53</sup>Ibid., 236.

<sup>54</sup>Matskevich recounted a few “mistakes” that American journalists made in their coverage and treatment of the delegation but overall he was pleased by the good welcome the delegation received.

<sup>55</sup>Matskevich, *Chto my videli*, 233.

<sup>56</sup>RGANI, f. 5, op. 30, d. 107, ll. 1-45.

growing of corn, however, was a topic that was more likely to reach Khrushchev's sympathetic ear than general suggestions about how best to conduct cultural relations and improve the Soviet image abroad.

A report that the head of the 1955 Soviet journalistic delegation, Boris Polevoi, submitted to the Central Committee upon his return from the United States was surprisingly critical in its evaluations of Soviet impression management. Just as Matskevich did, Polevoi published a book, *American Diaries*, about his travels in the United States.<sup>57</sup> Much more interesting, however, is his sixteen-page report about the delegation's experience in the United States. The document shows that the Soviet cultural missionaries had learned that it was not enough to talk only about corn if they were to reach the hearts and minds of Americans. They had come to realize that their knowledge about the United States was no longer up to date, concluding that if Soviet delegations were to represent their own country and its politics successfully, they would have to be better informed about the enemy's social and cultural issues.<sup>58</sup>

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<sup>57</sup>Polevoi's book was originally published in 30,000 copies in 1956. In 1957, it was published again in a series for middle school children called *Shkolnaia biblioteka* (School Library). This edition was printed in 50,000 copies.

<sup>58</sup>RGANI, f. 5, op. 16, d. 734, ll. 131-45. "Otchet o poezdke delegatsii sovetskikh zhurnalistov po SShA." According to Frederick C. Barghoorn, the journalists were "suave, smooth, and thoroughly political" (294). The head of the delegation, Boris Nikolaevich Polevoi was both a *Pravda* correspondent and a novelist on the governing board of the Union of Soviet Writers. Other members were also highly ranked in the Soviet bureaucracy. For example, Aleksei Adzhubei, then editor of *Komsomol'skaia Pravda* later *Izvestiia*, and Khrushchev's son-in-law was present. Others were V. Berezhev of *Novoe vremia*, N. Gribachev of *Literaturnaia gazeta*, B. Izakov of *Mezhdunarodnaia zhizn'*, A. Sofronov of *Ogonek*, and V. Poltoratskii of *Izvestiia*. Barghoorn, *The Soviet Cultural Offensive*, 294. All delegations were political—that was nothing new—but the journalistic delegation was indeed stacked with talented people who presented themselves in a cultured way. Polevoi returned to America briefly in 1958 to attend a "reunion" of Soviet and American war veterans. Adzhubei was a member of Khrushchev's entourage during his 1959 visit to America. See Barghoorn, *The Soviet Cultural Offensive*, 296. An American journalistic delegation also visited the Soviet Union in February 1955, see RGANI, f. 5, op. 30, d. 119, ll. 51-54.

The delegation also had positive experiences to report on. During their busy schedule of getting to know the media business in the United States inside out, as well as visiting journalistic faculties at prestigious universities, they received warm welcomes everywhere. Important people took the time to meet with them, such as owners and main editors of newspapers, television networks, and departmental chairs and university professors. Everyone they met approved of the “renewal and strengthening of cultural relations, the exchange of know-how, mutual contacts and the growing exchange of delegations.” The journalists also familiarized themselves with the “cultural treasures of America.” They visited museums and galleries and went to concerts, but they also saw factories, mines, and farms and were happy to report that the print media had paid these visits much attention.<sup>59</sup>

Furthermore, “in line with the directive,” the delegation strived at all times to “explain the Soviet point of view” and clarify the Soviet way of life and the politics of coexistence and peace.<sup>60</sup> In order to do so, the journalists held press conferences and appeared on radio and television to reach a broad audience: “It was typical at these meetings for those present to almost always support the Soviet journalists, even showing sympathy to the Soviet speakers.”<sup>61</sup> They had also been ordered to give interviews to “reactionary” media, so they spoke to *U.S. News and World Report*, “which normally took an anti-Soviet stand on foreign issues” and seemed happy with the results, although Polevoi noted that not all communications with the media had gone smoothly. *Time* magazine, for example, distorted the answers the delegates gave at a press conference and never published the letter the

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<sup>59</sup>RGANI, f. 5, op. 15, d. 734, ll. 131-32.

<sup>60</sup>RGANI, f. 5, op. 15, d. 734, l. 132.

<sup>61</sup>RGANI, f. 5, op. 15, d. 734, ll. 132-33.



journalists sent to contradict the original article.<sup>62</sup> Polevoi likewise reported on the good behavior of his delegates: “in all conversations with Americans, during radio speeches, television broadcasts and during all interviews we gave to the press, in accordance with the directive, we constantly maintained a humble and friendly tone.” Only once were they forced to change tone in response to Senator Joseph C. O’Mahoney’s (D-Wyoming) “abusive attack on the Soviet press.” In response to his criticism of the Soviet press and his “ignorant assessment of the Soviet constitution,” the journalists gave him “an angry and sound rebuttal, which the next day, much to our surprise, was objectively noted in the Washington press.”<sup>63</sup>

The U.S. State Department planned the itinerary of the delegation, and it was closely followed, with the exception of leaving out Chicago and going instead to Salt Lake City. Foreseeing a big anti-Soviet demonstration in Chicago, the hosts wanted to spare the delegates the embarrassment. Although generally pleased with the schedule, the delegates complained to their escort from the State Department that no interaction with ordinary Americans was planned. This was clearly an important part of their mandate, because the delegates firmly pressed the issue and, as a result, they were allowed to meet with ordinary American families almost every night. They were divided into two, sometimes three, groups, and, according to Polevoi, this gave them “the most valuable material about the life and mood of real America.”<sup>64</sup> Their hosts were from all walks of life: from simple artisans and office workers to millionaires. They met with many editors and publishers, but also insurance agents, milk farmers, and leaders of prosperous ranches. They met with business

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<sup>62</sup>RGANI, f. 5, op. 15, d. 734, l. 133.

<sup>63</sup>RGANI, f. 5, op. 15, d. 734, l. 137.

<sup>64</sup>RGANI, f. 5, op. 15, d. 734, ll. 133-34. Quote l. 134.

executives and representatives of commerce. Mormons received them, even though “they usually do not accept foreigners.” In Hollywood both “bigwigs and bosses” hosted them, as well as ordinary artists. Everyone was pleasant, and the Soviet journalists felt that they had learned much about Americans and their perception of the Soviet Union.<sup>65</sup>

The most valuable impression from these dealings with Americans was that everyone who spoke to us sincerely welcomed ‘the Spirit of Geneva’ even though many of them did not want the Cold War to end since they feared the cunning intentions of the Soviet Union (we were often told: “we are afraid of you”). Nonetheless, the people hate the Cold War, and all of them talked about the renewal and expansion of cultural relations, about the exchange of delegations, and how the doors for tourists should be more open in both countries.<sup>66</sup>

Polevoi claimed that the people they met with were instructed by State Department representatives to emphasize the need for greater cultural relations. It is not clear if that was the case, but this was certainly how it would have been done in the Soviet Union. The American families and ordinary people the delegates spent their evenings with were probably all friendly and open, but their political leanings remain uncertain. The journalists praised these encounters, saying they were much more impressive and informative than meetings with officials, but there was a catch. “We are certain,” wrote Polevoi,

that we were hurt by poor knowledge of American life, the superficial, vulgar illumination of processes going on in the country, and especially our superficial knowledge about the economy prevents the establishment of good relations. We are constantly harping on the dark side of American life, conducted in the same spirit of endlessly repeating one or the other outdated themes.<sup>67</sup>

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<sup>65</sup>The delegation also met with progressive cultural activists such as Paul Robeson, Howard Fast, and others. RGANI, f. 5, op. 15, d. 734, l. 137.

<sup>66</sup>RGANI, f. 5, op. 15, d. 734, l. 134.

<sup>67</sup>Ibid.

This must have been a matter of some concern for the Soviet authorities, and it did not get any better when a friend of the Soviet Union, fellow traveler Paul Robeson, offered the delegation advice: “In the name of God, do not advocate for the Negroes with the methods of Beecher Stowe. . . . The Negro Question is more complicated than that.”<sup>68</sup> Polevoi wrote that they had accepted Robeson’s advice and that he advocated for the need to update Soviet knowledge about the position of African-Americans as well as black people all over the world. They should speak on behalf of “all cultured humankind,” taking into account the substantial concessions Americans had made to African-Americans and not see only black and white in society. Polevoi claimed that taking a position with ‘Negroes’ as a whole against white people would only harm the Soviet cause, and people would reject it.<sup>69</sup>

Since Soviet-American cultural exchanges were still in the early stages, the exchanges of delegations in 1955 had much educational value. Polevoi not only pointed out lack of knowledge about American society, but also offered opinions on how best to proceed with the exchanges without embarrassing Soviet officials and how to help them propagandize effectively about America:

We think that we should completely rethink the system of propaganda about American topics. We should reject in every way possible provocative publications and concentrate in depth on the main points while clearly illuminating the problems of American life. To begin with, we could publish the materials written by the members of the delegation in their respective journals and magazines. Before that, it goes without saying, we need to have serious introductory conversations with the Central Committee.<sup>70</sup>

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<sup>68</sup>RGANI, f. 5, op. 15, d. 734, l. 135.

<sup>69</sup>Ibid.

<sup>70</sup>Ibid.

All of the journalists published accounts of their trip in their respective publications, and, additionally, Polevoi and Gribachev wrote books that recounted their experiences. The delegates were under orders to adhere strictly to the spirit of Geneva in their writing and focus on what had already been achieved in Soviet-American relations. The journalists, however, argued that the publications could provide enlightening information about American life while “*not deviating from our principal ideological position.*”<sup>71</sup> In short, they wanted to “objectively shed light on the life and on the most interesting achievements of the American people.”<sup>72</sup>

A 1958 Central Committee evaluation of “false portrayals of bourgeois realities in contemporary Soviet art and literature” complimented Polevoi and Gribachev<sup>73</sup> on their publications. This report praised their “especially successful” accounts of foreign travel as they “exposed the reactionary politics ruling in the bourgeois world, revealed the inhumanity of bourgeois society and the difficult position of workers.”<sup>74</sup> However, Polevoi’s *American Diaries* also presented its readers with a more attractive image of America than any other Soviet account of the postwar era had done.<sup>75</sup> Publications on experiences abroad in

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<sup>71</sup>RGANI, f. 5, op. 15, d. 734, l. 137. Emphasis in original.

<sup>72</sup>Ibid.

<sup>73</sup>Nikolai M. Gribachev, *Avгustovskie zvezdy* (Moscow: Sovetskii pisatel’, 1958) is cited in the editor’s footnotes to this published document but I think it is more likely that the original report was referring to Gribachev’s nonfictional account of the delegations’ travels in the United States, *Semero v Amerika; Zapiski korrespondenta “Literaturnoi gazety” o poezdke v SShA gruppy sovetskikh zhurnalistov v oktiabre-noiabre 1955g.* (Moscow: Sovetskii pisatel’, 1956). The theme of America seems to have continued to occupy Gribachev, who also published a poem about the United States in 1961. See his *Amerika, Amerika . . . poema* (Moscow: Sovetskii pisatel’, 1961).

<sup>74</sup>E. S. Afanas’eva and V. Iu. Afiani, eds., *Ideologicheskie komissii TsK KPSS 1958-1964: Dokumenty* (Moscow: Rosspen, 1998), 127.

<sup>75</sup>Barghoorn, *The Soviet Cultural Offensive*, 298.

newspapers, weeklies, and in travelogues were one way the authorities “helped” ordinary people to understand the West, and it has been claimed that the writings of this delegation marked a noteworthy change in the American image presented to the Soviet people. At the time, Frederick C. Barghoorn heard from “an American in Moscow” that Vladimir Berezhkov of *Novoe vremia* (*New Times*) claimed that the trip had marked a “rediscovery of America.” Barghoorn also concluded that, in spite of the ideological language and the precautions about American life, the accounts conveyed “the teeming activity, material prosperity, and glittering gadgetry of America”<sup>76</sup> to the Soviet reader.

Soviet authorities were torn between reconciling increased relations with the West and risking too much contamination by western influences in general. Such concerns were even more pressing when attempting to control the experiences and reporting of people who traveled to the United States. Furthermore, the Soviet side also had an interest in learning from the Americans, especially on issues such as the growing of corn but also on how to successfully propagandize to Americans. In this regard, they still had a lot to learn. Unlike Stalin, Khrushchev realized that sending Soviet delegations abroad could prove helpful, and he relied on Soviet missionaries to gather facts and—at least in the case of corn—he carefully studied the facts and information they brought back. Since delegation reports were sent to the Central Committee, there is a good chance that Khrushchev saw many of them. In any case, the advice of Soviet delegates—and sometimes of well-meaning Americans—reached high officials in the party hierarchy and may have contributed to the way that perceptions of cultural relations with the West rapidly changed in the coming few years.

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<sup>76</sup>Ibid., 298-99.

## **Rethinking Soviet Propaganda for Americans**

The perceived success of 1955 was considerable. While Moscow VOKS agents reported that the possibilities of creating exchanges in the international climate had been “insufficiently taken advantage of,” they nevertheless noted that things were looking up in Soviet-American cultural relations. The “serious obstacles” presented by the American government had somewhat been lifted, and they felt that interest in the Soviet Union was on the rise. Happily, they reported that during the first ten months in 1955 they had received 350 letters from Americans looking to correspond with Soviet organizations and individuals, as opposed to 260 letters in 1954.<sup>77</sup> The same report applauded United Press Agency Reporter Henry Shapiro’s recent coverage of the situation in Moscow. He had just returned to Moscow after a two-year absence and found the Soviet Union completely changed. Before, he had not been able to do much interesting work in the Soviet Union, as people there used to “run away from foreigners.” Now, he claimed, the atmosphere was different. Shapiro reported on the “unusual politeness and friendliness” he was met with and how people actually sought conversations with him. He also observed that people were better dressed than before and that the stores had better products. This kind of reporting obviously pleased the Soviet authorities—this was precisely the kind of “propaganda” they themselves wanted to disseminate. It escaped them, however, that Shapiro’s observations emphasized change, thus indicating that only two years earlier, the Soviet people did not feel free to talk to or display friendliness to American journalists. Shapiro’s discussion of the housing

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<sup>77</sup>GARF, f. 5283, op. 14, d. 577, l. 170.

problem in Moscow did not seem to concern them—for housing was one of the issues that the government planned on improving in the mid-1950s.<sup>78</sup>

Well-dressed people shopping in well-stocked stores were of course ideal images for propaganda and, according to Elizabeth Moos at the National Council for American-Soviet Friendship, these images were best conveyed to Americans through film: “Correct conclusions will be drawn from good pictures, *showing works better than telling for our audiences.*”<sup>79</sup> She continued:

Documentary films on the daily life of the Soviet people are urgently needed. They should *not run more than a half hour each* and have a minimum of commentary. In fact, the pictures with music and captions would be most useful, commentary could then be made by the person showing the film. Such pictures should show family life, an ordinary working day, industry, agriculture, recreation, trade union centers, an average holiday in the part, in the houses of culture; children in school, nursery and kindergarten.

Moos observed that the documentaries the Soviets sent over featured special celebrations and congresses of the Communist Party and thus did not create interest in the Soviet way of life.

While these are beautiful, they are not as effective as educational material because they do not depict ordinary, everyday, life. In considering documentaries for the USA the producer *should* start from the assumption that the average person in our audience has utterly preconceived ideas that are false about life and work in the Soviet Union, particularly about the family and trade unions. Pictures of the wonderful new projects and great buildings do not affect this false concept. Pictures of children and parents at home, people at the market, people enjoying themselves in the parks, libraries, etc., are helpful.<sup>80</sup>

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<sup>78</sup>GARF, f. 5283, op. 14, d. 577, l. 170. Henry Shapiro had a long career as United Press International’s Chief Moscow Correspondent and Bureau Manager. He was hired in 1937, appointed manager of the Moscow bureau in 1939 and remained in that position until retirement in 1973. In 1954 Shapiro published the book *L’U.R.S.S. après Staline* (Paris: Gallimard, 1954).

<sup>79</sup>GARF, f. 5283, op. 14, d. 577, l. 7. Emphasis in original.

<sup>80</sup>*Ibid.*

American fellow-travelers had on several occasions offered advice on how the Soviet Union should present itself to Americans, none more bluntly than Paul Robeson in his discussion of the “Negro Question,” but the archives reveal several instances in which Soviet cultural officials asked their American friends for advice on how to best appeal to American audiences.

Both in 1944 and later in 1956, the agreements on exchanging journals had included a Soviet counterpart to *Amerika*. First named *Information Bulletin*, the Soviet journal was renamed *USSR* in 1956. The Soviet side struggled with what to publish in *USSR*. The editors decided that general stories about the life of Soviet people as well as pieces about famous Soviet writers, art, and music would interest American readers. They also decided to dedicate an issue to Marshall Zhukov, “whose name is popular in the USA,” and focus on photographic material.<sup>81</sup> These plans, however, were not successful.

On April 12, 1957, the editor of *USSR*, Comrade Mamedov, met with a group of twenty Americans identified as “American readers of *USSR*,” who shared their take on the journal, criticized it, and offered their opinions on how to develop future issues of *USSR*.<sup>82</sup> One of the Americans, Marcus Goldman, a Ph.D. in geology, had visited the Soviet Union in the 1930s and had “a progressive mood.” He advised the editor not to write so much about machines and technical issues: a recent article on a mechanic had been both shallow and uninteresting to Americans. Goldman suggested they publish more stories and poems and go more deeply and more professionally into cultural and scientific issues. He specifically criticized an article about popular Soviet scientific films, which he thought both superficial

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<sup>81</sup>RGANI, f. 5, op. 30, d. 20, ll. 16-17.

<sup>82</sup>GARF, f. 9518, op. 1, d. 346, ll. 8-12.



and poorly illustrated. An African-American mechanic, Clarens Martins, especially interested in articles about science and technology, also said that the articles were superficial and did not explain issues in detail. He admitted that his perception might differ from that of other readers who had less knowledge of technological issues, but he claimed that “more depth” would increase interest in the journal because “middle Americans have an adequate grasp of technology.”<sup>83</sup> This group, seemingly assembled with the help of the Soviet ambassador in Washington, D.C., is remarkably similar to focus groups organized by marketing firms in order to evaluate services and test new products or ideas and serves as yet another indication of how inadequate Soviet cultural authorities felt in the propaganda war against the United States. The fact that they needed Americans to tell them to publish more articles on contemporary literature, art, films, and places of interest in the Soviet Union (besides Moscow, Ukraine and Georgia, which all were adequately covered and also on itineraries of foreign tourists) and decorate it with color pictures is astonishing. Several of the reviewers also commented on how difficult it was to find the journal in the United States and on how poor the English translations were.<sup>84</sup> Repeatedly, Soviet agitators reveal their amateurish methods and lack of knowledge in the methods of effective propaganda. Relying on their American friends, however, for support, was a smart move for public relations, and they received good advice about how to improve their propaganda.

Getting Soviet propaganda across to Americans was the most important part of a delegation’s mission, and the 1955 journalists were not altogether pleased with their preparation and subsequent lack of success. To that effect, Polevoi related some advice from

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<sup>83</sup>GARF, f. 9518, op. 1, d. 346, ll. 8-12.

<sup>84</sup>GARF, f. 9518, op. 1, d. 346, ll. 8-12.

his delegation on how best to spread the truth about the Soviet Union in the United States and represent Khrushchev's social, economic, and political accomplishments to Americans. The delegation of journalists in 1955 had concluded that it was necessary for the Soviet Union to change its strategy toward Americans, offering a long list of advice on how to go about doing exactly that. They repeatedly emphasized how helpful it was to meet with Americans in their homes and how the meetings were always pleasant and showed that Americans wanted to maintain friendly relations with the Soviet Union.

Polevoi reported that Americans respected the sufferings and achievements of the Soviet nation during the Second World War. This feeling of empathy, he stated, could be utilized in the Soviet propaganda that emphasized the "reconstruction of mutual understanding and trust between our two nations."<sup>85</sup> Reminding Americans of the wartime alliance would surely be effective—after all, the end of the Second World War was only ten years ago. This subject was close to Polevoi's heart, for he himself was a veteran of the meeting of Soviet and American soldiers on the Elbe in Germany.<sup>86</sup> In his *American Diaries*, Polevoi searches for John Smith, whom he met at the Elbe in 1945. Ten years later, he claimed in the book, he was unable to find "a 'real American'" such as Smith.<sup>87</sup> Secretly, however, he suggested that the Soviets could learn a thing or two in impression management from the Americans, but publicly he denounced the average John Doe as uncultured and corrupt. Incidentally,

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<sup>85</sup>RGANI, f. 5, op. 15, d. 734, l. 134.

<sup>86</sup>Barghoorn, *The Soviet Cultural Offensive*, 298.

<sup>87</sup>Boris Polevoi, *Amerikanskii dnevniki* (Moscow: Sovetskii pisatel', 1956), 65, 80 and 169. Also discussed in Barghoorn, *The Soviet Cultural Offensive*, 298.

Polevoi's next trip to the United States was in 1958, when he attended a reunion of Soviet-American veterans: the first reunion celebrated in the United States.

Polevoi claimed on behalf of the journalists "that we have finally learned how to actually propagandize the advancements of Soviet politics and the Soviet way of life in the United States." He continued, "it is not achieving anything to rely only on our very limited and isolated group of friends of the Soviet Union." Those people are already convinced of the superiority of the Soviet way of life, he said.<sup>88</sup> In sum, they had been preaching to the converted. Polevoi pointed out how Western ambassadors, embassy workers, and journalists used every opportunity to give public talks anywhere they could get an audience: at prominent universities, on the radio, and on television. Soviet diplomats and journalists in New York and Washington had not once taken advantage of this opportunity and had a reputation for being "hermits" among foreign journalists in these cities. Curious, the delegates inquired about the roots of this inactivity of their compatriots abroad and were told that they were not supposed to deviate from the prepared text "from above" anyway. It was a problem, the journalists concluded, that these people seemed to have lost the ability to trust their own judgment. Had everyone forgotten, for example, the work of Soviet diplomats and journalists in the 1930s and during World War II? They had been good representatives of the Soviet way of life and had advocated for the establishment of mutual understanding between nations. The problem was serious: "We really need to do something and we need to do it

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<sup>88</sup>RGANI, f. 5, op. 15, d. 734, l. 138.

now, because we have this problem not only in the United States, but also in other capitalist countries, and we have much to lose and [our behavior] indulges anti-Soviet lore.”<sup>89</sup>

In his suggestions on behalf of the journalists, Polevoi recounted several things that might be nourishing stereotypes of the Soviet Union and its people as uncivilized and uncultured. Soviet cultural organizations, for example, were notorious for letting requests from abroad go completely unanswered.<sup>90</sup> No Soviet cities, not even Moscow, had any tourist information available, but in the U.S. even the smallest city had “colorful brochures” loaded with photographs that contained information about the city, about its sights, and a map of the city with an index of hotels, theaters, museums, and restaurants. With growing numbers of tourists to the Soviet Union, this needed to be quickly improved; the expenses could be justified because they were in line with the government’s aim to introduce Soviet achievements to foreigners.<sup>91</sup>

The journalists were also impressed with the welcome Americans gave them. All cities had put together a welcoming committee, staffed with local intellectuals or eminent citizens. Members of these committees invited the Soviet guests to their homes, and escorted them to the theater or cultural events. “Such a committee would help create warmer contacts with the guests and would remove the outward appearance of state organizations involved in control that always have a bad effect upon representatives of foreign countries.”<sup>92</sup> One can

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<sup>89</sup>RGANI, f. 5, op. 15, d. 734, l. 138. The delegates were also in shock to find out that the staff of the New York TASS agency had poor knowledge of English and little knowledge about American life.

<sup>90</sup>RGANI, f. 5, op. 15, d. 734, ll. 140-41.

<sup>91</sup>RGANI, f. 5, op. 15, d. 734, l. 143.

<sup>92</sup>RGANI, f. 5, op. 15, d. 734, l. 144.

speculate, as is clear in the next chapter, that this advice was well heeded by the government. At the 1957 World Youth Festival in Moscow, the organizers put much emphasis on local receiving committees in all small cities and towns en route to Moscow. Local welcoming committees arranged by the Soviet Communist Party became a constant factor in all cultural activities that involved foreigners in the Soviet Union.

A welcoming committee, however important, would still not be the “gate to the country.” That honor went to Aeroflot, the first Soviet experience a foreigner traveling to the Soviet Union would have. An American farmer, John Jacobs, “a man favorable to the Soviet Union,”<sup>93</sup> gave them the following advice about Aeroflot: “as a ‘gate to the country,’ it served no purpose. If the gate is bad, nothing good can be expected to follow.” Of course, Jacobs said, he himself thought the Soviet gate not to be very important; he was very satisfied with the Soviet achievements in science and technology. It was just for the sake of other people flying to the Soviet Union that he told them that a foreigner stepping on an Aeroflot carrier in Prague or Helsinki immediately noticed a very strong difference in service. It was long known, Polevoi wrote, that “our ILY<sup>94</sup> lag behind the airplanes of the capitalist countries, but what we are talking about here is service, which normally is understood as ‘servis.’” The Russian word for service clearly did not begin to grasp what the American term entailed.

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<sup>93</sup>According to the report, John Jacobs had been to the Soviet Union and written a few reports and about ten articles that all stressed the spirit of friendship and mutual understanding. RGANI, f. 5, op. 15, d. 734, l. 142.

<sup>94</sup>Here they are referring to the aircrafts designed by the famous Soviet aircraft designer, Sergei Vladimirovich Ilyushin, who had designed attack aircrafts before and during the war and passenger planes after the war ended. “Ilyushin, Sergey Vladimirovich” *Encyclopedia Britannica 2005*. Retrieved from [http://www.britannica.com/eb/article-9042165\(.\)](http://www.britannica.com/eb/article-9042165(.)) Last accessed on November 18, 2005.

Polevoi complained that the delays in flights were outrageous, and the crew completely incompetent: “They do not know languages, do not offer newspapers or magazines, and do not pay any attention to the passengers.”<sup>95</sup> Furthermore, “breakfast was served without napkins, straight from a box. The food was cold, two days old, had been prepared and brought in from Moscow and was dried up.” It got worse; the “misses” (*devushki*) told them that the base gave them only “*two pieces of sugar per passenger*.”<sup>96</sup> If a passenger wanted an extra cup of tea, the “misses” had to pay for the extra sugar and tea themselves. “This is odd, but it is a fact,” Polevoi wrote. Apparently, this was not a new issue. What Polevoi warned against though, was that with the increasing numbers of tourists to the Soviet Union, the lack of service could potentially cause the Soviet image “serious, even political damage.”<sup>97</sup>

In spite of the selective process in choosing people who went abroad, the authorities were not happy with the preparation of delegations, cultural figures, and even large tourists groups that they had chosen to travel. The process of traveling to capitalist countries began with a long questionnaire, which anybody wishing to travel abroad had to fill out. The questionnaire concluded with questions about close relatives living abroad and whether the applicant had been abroad or displaced during the Great Patriotic War. The final task on the questionnaire was to list all close relatives: surely, people who had family abroad were more

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<sup>95</sup>RGANI, f. 5, op. 15, d. 734, ll. 142-43.

<sup>96</sup>Ibid. Emphasis in original.

<sup>97</sup>RGANI, f. 5, op. 15, d. 734, ll. 142-43. A 1956 Intourist report described different aspects of servicing foreign tourists. The report details the kinds of package tours Intourist will be offering foreigners, various meal plans, sightseeing tours, etc. This may be seen as a sign of tourism practices becoming more normalized and even modernized. International tourism was definitely structured and the report covered everything from nourishment, cultural events, luggage, and photography in detail. They also discussed the importance of providing foreigners with the opportunity to give their impressions of their stay somewhere—perhaps because they felt they could improve and learn from foreigners’ experiences with their service. GARF, f. 9612, op. 1, d. 387, ll. 47-69.

likely to defect while traveling, but this kind of questioning had to be viewed as a possible intimidation of the person wanting to travel.<sup>98</sup>

Still, preparation before traveling, guidance during the trip itself, and even published travelogues of people who visited foreign countries had a long way to go before meeting the expectations of Soviet authorities. In 1958, the Cultural Department of the Central Committee of the Communist Party expressed disappointment with recent publications (with the exception of Polevoi's and Gribachev's work), and longed for writings in the style of Gorky and Mayakovsky, "who exposed social conflicts of the bourgeois world while praising the arrangement of Soviet, socialist ideology."<sup>99</sup> This "fighting tradition" seemed to be lost: the officials felt that the new travelogues were written more generally and did not focus enough on "Soviet ideology and morals, the Soviet way of life and Soviet art."<sup>100</sup> They attributed this partly to the fact that, during a short visit, perceptions of a country could not go much beyond "exhibited sides of life," put on show to advertise "bourgeois propaganda," and therefore the perceptions did not cover "the inconspicuous contradictory realities in the bourgeois world."<sup>101</sup>

During these first years of renewed foreign tourism, this posed a problem for Soviet officials. How were they to properly prepare their own people for trips to the West? How

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<sup>98</sup>GARF, f. 9612, op. 1, d. 387, ll. 38-39. For travel to People's Democracies, there was no question about family and only one question that asked if the person wanting to travel had been abroad, and if so, then when and for what purpose. GARF, f. 9612, op. 1, d. 387, l. 37.

<sup>99</sup>Afanas'eva and Afiani, eds., *Ideologicheskie komissii*, 133. M. Kol'tsov and L. Reisner are also mentioned as good representatives.

<sup>100</sup>Ibid., 133. The document in question is "Postanovlenie Komissii TsK KPSS 'O nevernom izobrazhenii burzhuaaznoi deistvitel'nosti v sovremennom sovetskom iskusstve i literature' 26 dekabria 1958 g. Prilozhenie No. 2: Zapiska otdela kul'tury TsK KPSS. 18 noiabria 1958 g." Written by B. Iarustovskii and I. Chernoutsan.

<sup>101</sup>Ibid., 128.

were they to prevent them from returning and recounting enthusiastically what they had been told and shown? Tourists and delegates alike were, according to Soviet authorities, not sufficiently prepared to take on the task of viewing American accomplishments through a socialist lens while simultaneously representing the socialist way of life. This was an ongoing struggle within all organizations and government departments involved in cultural and personal exchange with the United States. The struggle to control the experience and perceptions deriving from increased travel, openness, and flow of information so that they would not have people recount their experiences in a “spirit of servility”<sup>102</sup> always went hand in hand with the mission of telling the “truth” about the Soviet Union and its accomplishments. Lacking in resources, tools, and qualified people, the Soviet side found itself on the defensive in this battle. Interestingly, it often thought that the “superficial” nature of these trips was a major cause of their problems—people needed better training in how to look behind the façade of what they were being shown in America.

### **Soviet Strategies for Impression Management**

The problem of reconciling the various goals of the Soviet cultural mission was an ever-present one. Polevoi’s conclusion, that the Soviet strategy of relying on friendly circles abroad, i.e., front organizations, was bankrupt started to hit home in the mid to late 1950s. Following the moderate success of 1955, Soviet authorities reached the conclusion that their cultural strategies needed to be updated and modernized. In 1957 and 1958, the organizational structure of cultural relations with foreign countries was revolutionized. Soviet authorities wanted to modernize the mission of promoting the image of the Soviet

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<sup>102</sup>Ibid., 128.



Union, while helping foreigners reach “correct” conclusions about socialism and controlling their own people’s perceptions of the West.

As America recovered from the damage inflicted by the Communist witch hunts upon its popular moods and opinions toward “communism” in general, Soviet authorities still had to work against strong anti-Soviet currents to get ordinary Americans interested in their country. Therefore, the Soviet side remained deeply concerned about the widespread lack of interest in the Soviet Union. In 1957, Zhukov reported that the Soviet Embassy in Washington was concerned about the increased attacks in the Soviet press on America. After *The Washington Post* published an article in August titled “What Does Ivan Think About Us?” the embassy proposed to give a press conference in order to correct the story and tell Americans what the Soviet public really knew about America. On behalf of the State Committee for Cultural Relations, Zhukov decided that the Americans would use such a meeting in order to justify their criticism of the Soviet state.<sup>103</sup>

A 1958 directive from the Cultural Department of the Soviet Embassy in Moscow reported on the main problems they had to fight in the United States. Anti-Soviet propaganda was aired “every hour on radio and in television, every day through film and the periodical press, every month and every year anti-Soviet books are published, speeches and lectures about the Soviet Union are given.”<sup>104</sup> According to the report, American anti-Soviet propaganda emphasized five themes: the absence of genuine democracy in the USSR; the shortage of consumer goods; deviations from the principles of Marxism in the practical building of socialism in the USSR; the foreign policy of the Soviet Union; and, finally, the

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<sup>103</sup>RGANI, f. 5, op. 30, d. 31, l. 72

<sup>104</sup>GARF, f. 9518, op. 1, d. 347, l. 133.

use of the fine arts in propaganda.<sup>105</sup> When looking back at the five themes identified in chapter 2 as representative of the popular counter-myth, the resemblance is considerable. The Soviet people pondered the nature of Soviet and American democracy, the superpowers' take on global issues, living standards, and corrupt leaders. Ever since the Second World War, and especially as of 1947, American anti-Soviet propaganda had contributed to the counter-myth of America in the Soviet Union. During the 1950s, Soviet cultural officials reported that very similar images were predominant among the American public.

Young Americans, according to Soviet diplomats, were convinced of the superiority of American-style democracy and repeatedly pointed to lack of freedom of speech, freedom of the press, and general democracy in the Soviet Union. As for the emphasis on heavy industry at the expense of consumer products, they noted how, in the United States, people generally held the opinion that Soviet people were “poorly dressed, badly nourished, and live in bad apartments. . . . They keep saying that unemployed people in the United States live better than workers in the Soviet Union.”<sup>106</sup> The American press and population admired Soviet success in technology and in rebuilding the economy, but used the shortages of consumer goods to belittle the accomplishments: “American satellites may be only the size of an orange and Soviet citizens may have more satellites but the American people have enough oranges and other fruits in abundance.”<sup>107</sup> Khrushchev had used this metaphor to ridicule American accomplishments in outer space, but the American press found a way to turn it against him.

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<sup>105</sup>Ibid.

<sup>106</sup>GARF, f. 9518, op. 1, d. 347, l. 137.

<sup>107</sup>Ibid. This was apparently from the *New York Times*.

In 1958, the general effort of Soviet propaganda in the United States was to be directed at the “exposure of false arguments” such as the ones above. The means and the methods to fight the American propaganda machine on its home territory, however, were limited. Soviet radio broadcasts were beamed at restricted waves in the United States, and few American listeners tuned in or even received the broadcasts. Instead, the thirty-nine million television sets in the United States and the countless radios constantly broadcast anti-Soviet materials with the “methods of American advertising.” The Soviet Embassy workers judged that repetition seemingly was very effective in getting the anti-Soviet message through to ordinary Americans.<sup>108</sup>

In the summer of 1958, when the report was written, the number one book on the *New York Times* bestseller list was John Gunther’s *Inside Russia Today*, and second was J. Edgar Hoover’s tale of American Communists, *Masters of Deceit: The Story of Communism in America and How to Fight It*. Milovan Djilas’s *The New Class* was also much advertised and, according to the report, many other “anti-Soviet books” on subjects such as the Gulag were given much space in American bookstores.<sup>109</sup> The embassy workers argued, however, that their responses to anti-Soviet books such as *Inside Russia Today* were not issued quickly enough. They should also publish many more books in foreign languages: “it would be most effective if we were to publish a book called *Inside America Today*, illuminating all the

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<sup>108</sup>GARF, f. 9518, op. 1, d. 347, ll. 144-47. The power of film as a propaganda measure is discussed repeatedly in Soviet sources. Polevoi had in 1955 proposed an American film festival in the Soviet Union and a Soviet the USA. RGANI f. 5, op. 15, d. 734, l. 140.

<sup>109</sup>GARF, f. 9518, op. 1, d. 347, l. 148.

questions raised by Gunther in his book, but apply them to American realities.”<sup>110</sup> Thus, the American market for anti-Soviet literature gave Soviet authorities ideas on how to produce their own anti-American propaganda.

The embassy praised the propaganda efforts of Soviet delegations but recommended that exchanges of delegations could be used more effectively.<sup>111</sup> The embassy workers urged that all invitations to Soviet artists to perform in the United States be accepted, since such performances generally got much attention among the American public. They also speculated that it would be beneficial to include “a Jewish number” in their ensembles, as “many Jews live in America and often they hold influential positions.” This, they claimed, would be seen positively in the United States, as American propaganda “often states that anti-Semitism prevails in the USSR.”<sup>112</sup>

In spite of the general success of delegations, they needed to be better prepared for the kinds of questions they would encounter in the United States. Apparently, “very often Americans pose provocative questions . . . their own propaganda makes fools of them and they do not think in terms outside of this propaganda.” As examples of the subjects of sensitive questions that needed to be clarified in advance, the report writers mentioned the “era of Stalinism,” the freedom of expression in the USSR, and the invasion in Hungary in 1956: “Avoiding answering such questions leaves a very bad impression and can be used to

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<sup>110</sup>GARF, f. 9518, op. 1, d. 347, l. 151. Polevoi stated that there was great shortage of Soviet books in the United States. He also mentioned the issue of royalties and suggested that the government would pay several progressive authors their royalties. RGANI, f. 5, op. 15, d. 734, ll. 131-45. The issue of royalties came up repeatedly in discussions about improving Soviet-American cultural relations and it was a sensitive point for the Soviet authorities, who ignored international treaties on copyright and royalties.

<sup>111</sup>GARF, f. 9518, op. 1, d. 347, ll. 144-47. Polevoi also recommended increased exchanges of journalists after visiting the journalism faculty at Columbia University. RGANI, f. 5, op. 15, d. 734, l. 141.

<sup>112</sup>GARF, f. 9518, op. 1, d. 347, l. 152.

the advantage of American propaganda.”<sup>113</sup> This was always a difficult issue, as Soviet delegates often felt their hosts were rude in asking questions that challenged the nature of the Soviet system. Realizing that avoiding sensitive topics was damaging to the Soviet image thus represented an important step forward.

At the high point of peaceful coexistence between the United States and the Soviet Union, but in the shadow of alarming events in the Middle East, two-time presidential candidate of the American Democratic Party Adlai Stevenson visited the Soviet Union in 1958. His visit shows that in representing Khrushchev’s Soviet Union—perhaps because they had learned a thing or two about impression management—Soviet cultural officials now tried as hard as they could to fulfill the wishes of the travelers and not avoid sensitive sights and topics. The Soviet Union that Stevenson visited was a very different place from Stalin’s postwar Soviet Union that Steinbeck had visited in 1947, and, at first glance, the two men had little in common, one being a career politician and the other a left-wing writer. What they did have in common, however, was their long-term interest in the Soviet Union and the fact that both of them had visited the Soviet Union before World War II.<sup>114</sup> Both of them wrote articles about their trips that were later published in book form, and both visits left a long paper trail in Russian archives as their daily activities were reported on and speculations on the course of their actions were undertaken by their “sputniks” or Soviet traveling companions.<sup>115</sup>

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<sup>113</sup>GARF, f. 9518, op. 1, d. 347, l. 151.

<sup>114</sup>Stevenson had visited the USSR in 1926.

<sup>115</sup>The newly established State Committee for Cultural Relations with Foreign Countries at the Council of Ministers reported on Stevenson’s trip, while in 1947 VOKS had been responsible for monitoring Steinbeck’s visit.

Adlai Stevenson traveled to the Soviet Union as a tourist with two of his sons and a group of friends. Stevenson was especially interested in getting to know the various Soviet republics in Central Asia, and he prepared well for all of his destinations. Stevenson was a keen observer. He took many initiatives, asking to speak to performers after shows and taking spontaneous walks around towns or train stations where he was visiting.<sup>116</sup> In strong contrast to Steinbeck's experience, his wishes were granted if possible, and overall there seems to have been much more tolerance toward Stevenson's requests and behavior during his stay than Steinbeck experienced in the late 1940s.<sup>117</sup> Steinbeck, for example, wrote about the inefficiency of the Soviet cultural officials, who had them linger for days in Moscow before deciding who was supposed to take care of them. For a couple of days, Steinbeck and Capa had no idea who had invited them and what their status was in the Soviet Union.<sup>118</sup> Stevenson's case was different. He was a world-famous politician, and it was consistent with Khrushchev's emphasis on peaceful coexistence that Stevenson be given near royal treatment in the Soviet Union, including a surprise meeting with Premier Khrushchev himself.

In general, there was much discussion of cooperation and coexistence during Stevenson's visit. The Soviets seemed satisfied with recognition of the possibilities for improved Soviet-American relations, but Stevenson still asked questions about "uncomfortable" issues, such as why so many cities and areas in the Soviet Union were off limits to foreigners. Addressing this issue, Comrade Gordeev of the Altai region claimed that, although he could not speak for the rest of the country, Stevenson could visit every corner of his region. He felt

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<sup>116</sup>GARF, f. 9518, op. 1, d. 347. Various listy.

<sup>117</sup>GARF, f. 9518, op. 1, d. 347, ll. 22-24. The report repeatedly claims that his wishes were granted.

<sup>118</sup>Steinbeck, *A Russian Journal*, 16.

obliged to mention, however, that “Soviet people, including tourists, are shown much less in the United States than Americans are shown in the Soviet Union.”<sup>119</sup> Stevenson’s day in Gorky, where he was taken to see the car factories and industrial production, indicates that he was shown more than the average visitor. Of course, his visit to Gorky was supervised, but the city was nevertheless closed to foreigners during most of the Cold War, and his going there reveals that he was seen as an important visitor by the Soviet authorities.

Stevenson’s entourage was a lively one. His youngest son, John, carried two cameras with him and took many photographs. Their Soviet traveling companions tolerated this behavior, but their dislike was clear in reports of how John took pictures of poorly dressed children and specifically visited a third-class wagon of a train they traveled on in order to take photos of the passengers. In general, however, the Soviets wrote admiringly of Stevenson’s commitment to peaceful coexistence and increased cultural and educational exchanges between the two countries, noting how diligently he used his evenings to prepare for meetings with Soviet ministers and dignitaries. Apart from studying at night, the entourage listened to the Voice of America<sup>120</sup> and sometimes even entertained “chance acquaintances” in their hotel rooms. They played jazz records for them and answered questions about the United States: “Their questions about phonographs, radio, TV, schools, automobiles, and every aspect of life in America, were searching and always accompanied by politeness and dignity.”<sup>121</sup>

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<sup>119</sup>GARF, f. 9518, op. 1, d. 347, l. 25.

<sup>120</sup>GARF, f. 9518, op. 1, d. 347, ll. 96-97.

<sup>121</sup>Stevenson, *Friends and Enemies*, 41.

Overall, Stevenson was very impressed with the hospitality and courtesy of the Soviet people. In his account of the trip, he noted that “the Russians like us” and they did not want a renewed war any more than Americans did. He accounted for their interest in the American way of life by claiming that their curiosity reflected “obvious mistrust of the information the people were getting from their own sources.”<sup>122</sup> Similarly, his Soviet hosts recounted how several times Stevenson “was astounded by the insufficient knowledge of the Soviet people about the United States of America and underlined the importance of the increased travel of Soviet people to the United States and of American people to the USSR.”<sup>123</sup>

It is interesting to note, however, that Americans traveling to the Soviet Union were surprised to see that Soviet people looked well fed and “normal,” and the accounts of Steinbeck and Stevenson both suggest that even well-informed Americans such as themselves had misperceptions of the Soviet Union and daily life there. The Soviet Union certainly had an image problem in the United States, and Soviet authorities hardly succeeded in repairing it. In Soviet responses to provocative comments and questions from Americans, visible in both Steinbeck’s and Stevenson’s reports as in the overall evaluations from cultural representatives, the rule of reciprocity was followed. They always answered allegations or confrontations from foreigners with a counterattack about the situation on the other side.

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<sup>122</sup>Ibid., 40 and 42.

<sup>123</sup>GARF, f. 9518, op. 1, d. 347, l. 93.



Adlai Stevenson asked in the conclusions of his book, *Friends and Enemies*, whether coexistence was possible.<sup>124</sup> He hit on a common theme of misinformation and the lack of knowledge about the other in both nations:

It is important, I believe, for us to make every possible effort to lessen their ignorance of our country and its democratic way of life. But likewise we need to study them hard and try by every means for better understanding and deeper appreciation of the conditions of life, attitudes, values and ideas, of the Russian people and their Communist masters.<sup>125</sup>

In 1958, coexistence was real, but as became clear in Khrushchev's relationship with the West after the Secret Speech at the Twentieth Congress in 1956 and the resulting thaw, coexisting with the United States brought with it the problems of consumerism and image control. Attempting to peacefully coexist while also helping the Soviet and the American people reach "correct conclusions" about each other proved to be the essence of Khrushchev's cultural policy toward the United States in the late 1950s.

### **"Correct Conclusions" About the Soviet Union<sup>126</sup>**

Soviet delegations and cultural officials slowly realized the difficulty of their mission: Soviet knowledge of the United States, the country, and its people was often superficial and outdated. This, in turn, fed into one of the Soviet state's main fears, namely, that Soviet citizens who came in touch with American popular culture and values were easily converted. The Soviet authorities still discouraged any infatuation with the West on behalf of Soviet citizens and were slow in realizing that it was difficult for the delegates to balance their

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<sup>124</sup>Stevenson, *Friends and Enemies*, 92.

<sup>125</sup>*Ibid.*, 97.

<sup>126</sup>GARF, f. 5283, op. 14, d. 577, l.7. The wording is also used in GARF, f. 5283, op. 22s, d. 581, l. 28.

information gathering about United States' industrial supremacy while simultaneously expecting them to criticize the American social system and praise all things Soviet. People involved in cultural relations with the United States had to tread a narrow path between getting to know useful things about American society and searching for negative things at the same time. Though their accounts of America were heavily influenced by the expectations of the Soviet government, these exchanges left an impression on the Soviet participants that often went beyond their mandate.

The paradox of preaching the gospel of Soviet socialism while simultaneously fearing the conversion of the missionaries ended up becoming a real problem for the Soviet leadership. Scholars have even claimed that cultural exchanges and personal contacts worked so much in the United States' favor that they helped the country win the Cold War.<sup>127</sup> Soviet authorities seemed on the defensive in almost all aspects of the cultural Cold War. While poor service and lack of well-trained staff were indeed serious problems, they were by no means the only worries government officials had. Soviet propaganda in America was out of date, and American visitors repeatedly denounced the poor knowledge Soviet people had of the United States. Finally, Soviet accomplishments at home were not impressive enough to convince skeptical visitors from capitalist countries of Soviet strength and superiority.

The Soviet Communist Party was always determined to “control intellectual life”<sup>128</sup> but found it hard to balance updating the appearances of Soviet cultural delegation and attachés and controlling their experiences. As Soviet visitors realized that their knowledge of the

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<sup>127</sup>See for example Yale Richmond, *Cultural Exchange and the Cold War: Raising the Iron Curtain* (University Park, PA: The Pennsylvania State University Press, 2003).

<sup>128</sup>William Taubman, *Khrushchev: The Man and His Era* (New York: W. W. Norton & Company, 2003), 306.

United States, both the country and its people, was superficial and outdated, they tried to convince the authorities that better preparation was in order. Furthermore, the Soviet image needed to be modernized and more service-oriented. The lack of “correct” materials about the Soviet Union for Americans, both in the United States and in the Soviet Union, hurt the mission of telling the truth about the Soviet Union, especially as they had lost access to “friendly circles.”

By 1955, it was becoming clear that lagging behind in “service” and the general availability of consumer goods harmed the image of the Soviet Union in the United States and at home. While the Soviet leadership tried to adapt to a changing world by reorganizing the institutions involved in cultural relations with the United States and thus promote the image of the Soviet Union abroad, they remained far behind the Americans in the general techniques of impression management so important to cultural diplomacy. They tried, though, as we will see, in 1957 at the World Youth Festival in Moscow to present the Soviet Union as a land of abundance, well on its way to the construction of communism. But their means were limited and the methods too primitive for these events to have the effect the authorities wanted.

The admission that the Soviet Union lagged behind was an important one. Rallying Soviet people around the future goal of overtaking and surpassing America, as Khrushchev did in 1957, was in line with suggestions from various Soviet participants recounted here about what they could learn from the United States and how to improve the Soviet mission. While the political atmosphere underwent dramatic changes in the mid-1950s, there were certain continuities in the way that Soviet authorities perceived their success in representing themselves to Americans, at home and in the United States. Throughout the years, the

feeling of not reaching enough people became more pressing and lack of means to publicize the mission increased, especially as McCarthyism was no longer an obstacle. But the struggle to reconcile more exposure to American values with the strict ideological mission of the Soviet state also grew sharper.

The language that Soviet cultural officials and their American sympathizers used in discussing ways of depicting the Soviet Union shows the somewhat naïve belief that, with the correct methods, they would be able to convert Americans to the socialist cause. Soviet cultural officials were willing to help Americans reach “correct conclusions” about the Soviet Union and correct “false ideas” about socialism, and they seemed convinced that “telling the truth” about the Soviet Union would surely convert “unprejudiced” people to the Soviet cause. Both sides denounced the fear of another war that was cultivated in each country and assured the other that nobody wanted such a thing. Given the prominence of such rumors in the postwar Soviet Union, it was certainly an important step in Soviet perceptions of America when the Soviet leadership stopped advocating them and pressed instead for peaceful coexistence with Americans.

## Chapter 5

### **Celebrating, Controlling, Coexisting: Khrushchev and the West, 1957-59**

In the post-Secret Speech era, Soviet citizens hoped for better times, but the invasion of Hungary and the consequent hardening of policies in the Soviet Union and its satellite countries stalled prospects for fundamental changes, if only temporarily. Freedom of speech was put on hold: according to Soviet authorities, the Secret Speech had been interpreted “too loosely,” and Khrushchev started talking about Stalin’s “appropriate place in Soviet history” in spite of his “great shortcomings.”<sup>1</sup> The Thaw, however, was already under way, and Soviet society saw much change in the coming years. Despite the damage done to Khrushchev’s image abroad, he had launched the discourse of peaceful coexistence with the West and upheld the older slogan of peace and friendship with other nations. In the aftermath of the Soviet invasion of Hungary, he magnified this image of himself as a crusader for peaceful coexistence. Under Khrushchev, the Soviet Union campaigned to establish itself as the leader of the “non-aggressive world”—and attempted to actualize this

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<sup>1</sup>Elena Zubkova, *Russia After the War: Hopes, Illusions, and Disappointments, 1945-1957* (Armonk, NY: M.E. Sharpe, 1998), 198. On the failed experiment in information policy following the Secret Speech, see Susanne Schattenberg’s forthcoming article, “‘Democracy’ or ‘Despotism’? How the Secret Speech was Translated into Everyday Life” in Polly Jones, ed., *The Dilemmas of De-Stalinization: Negotiating Cultural and Social Change in the Khrushchev Era* (London: Routledge-Curzon, 2006). See also E. S. Afanas'eva and V. Iu Afiani, *Apparat TsK KPSS i kul'tura, 1953-1957: Dokumenty* (Moscow: Rosspen, 2001), 697-98: “Zapiska otdela kul'tury TsK KPSS s soglasiiem sekretarei TsK o neobkhodimosti publikatsii redaktsionnykh statei v gazetakh po dokladam N. S. Khrushcheva o literature i iskusstve, 24 avgusta 1957g.”

role by inviting, for example, world youth to Moscow in 1957 and pushing for meetings with American and Western leaders.

Contrary to the Kremlin's expectations, events like the Moscow Youth Festival in 1957 or Khrushchev's 1959 visit to the United States, both meant to highlight the accomplishments of the socialist state, saw only partial success in that regard. Khrushchev's personal goal was to establish that the Soviet Union was an equal of the United States. The country might be lacking in the availability of consumer goods but was ahead in technology and education and should thus be taken seriously. As early as 1957, it became clear, however, that Soviet leaders had underestimated the power of the cultural Cold War and the role living standards, convenience, leisure, and fashion were to play in it.

This chapter discusses Soviet efforts to put socialist achievements on display and how such plans backfired. In exploring the two-week celebration during the 1957 Moscow Youth Festival, I focus on the measures taken to control visitors' experiences in Moscow and perceptions of the Soviet Union. After discussing the development of Soviet cultural relations with the West, mainly with the United States of America, the chapter turns to what the Soviet side considered a "turning point" in Soviet-American cultural relations, namely, Khrushchev's 1959 visit to the United States, also meant to advertise and celebrate the accomplishments of the Soviet Union in the United States and impress the American public. However, as in the case of the Moscow Youth Festival, Khrushchev's American visit made more of an impression on the Soviet public, which enthusiastically responded to the trip in the name of peaceful coexistence. In celebrating socialism, the Soviet state overestimated the power of Sputnik and underestimated the popularity of nylons. Many Soviet people celebrated the newfound openness with the West, embracing the concept of peaceful

coexistence because they hoped it would bring their living standards up to the level of the United States of America, and they were relieved to not have to worry about a war between the superpowers.

### **The Purposes of Peaceful Coexistence**

Khrushchev showed much more nuance in his understanding of world politics than Stalin, who had seen the Cold War as a prelude to another great war—this time against America—and cultivated a strong fear of a renewed war among the war-torn Soviet population. Khrushchev, however, drawing on Lenin’s NEP-era pronouncements, stated that a war between the imperialist and the socialist camps was not inevitable—they were capable of competing and coexisting at the same time.<sup>2</sup> In Khrushchev’s version, as in Lenin’s, socialism would indeed prevail, but when Khrushchev took armed conflict out of the equation he also removed the fear of another war—much to the relief of Soviet subjects.

The purpose of peaceful coexistence was multifold. First and maybe most importantly, Khrushchev wanted the Soviet Union to be taken seriously as a global superpower, and he wanted to be recognized as a leader of historical significance. He played the role of peacemaker, ready to reconcile with the United States and to serve as a proverbial middleman between the socialist and anti-Soviet blocs. Reaching out to the developing world, Khrushchev tried to win over former colonies in Asia, Africa, and Latin America to the socialist cause. He attempted reconciliation with Tito’s Yugoslavia. In this context, the slogan “For Peace and Friendship” was often chanted and became an integral part of

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<sup>2</sup>Vladislav Zubok and Constantine Pleshakov, *Inside the Kremlin’s Cold War: From Stalin to Khrushchev* (Cambridge, Ma.: Harvard University Press, 1996), 184.

Khrushchev's foreign policy campaign, where "peace and friendship between nations" remained favorite toasts as a symbol of Soviet non-aggression.<sup>3</sup>

As for the Western world, Khrushchev had inherited from Stalin the still unresolved German question. As we have seen, one of the most important steps in dealing with this sensitive issue was the Geneva Conference, conducted in July 1955, where Khrushchev emphasized soft power and strengthened personal contacts with Western leaders.

Khrushchev's dedication to improving relations with the West was illustrated, for example, by the signing of cultural exchange agreements with Norway and Belgium in 1956 and England and France in 1957, and finally, of an agreement on cultural and educational exchanges with the United States on January 27, 1958.<sup>4</sup>

Peaceful coexistence also had a domestic purpose. In order to implement the social projects he had planned, Khrushchev needed to divert resources from the Soviet war machine and thus advance the socialist economy and lifestyle at home.<sup>5</sup> Thus Khrushchev promoted the policy as a part of his de-Stalinization campaign and the return to Leninism. Selling peaceful coexistence as believable to an audience that had for over a decade considered war with America inevitable may seem like a difficult project, but with the major steps taken in the mid to late 1950s, evident in increased interactions with the outside world on both the

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<sup>3</sup>The slogan "for peace and friendship" has its roots in the international peace movement and had been a part of the Soviet propaganda campaign since World War II.

<sup>4</sup>Yale Richmond, *Cultural Exchange and the Cold War: Raising the Iron Curtain* (University Park, PA: The Pennsylvania State University Press, 2003), 15. See also Gosudarstvennyi Arkhiv Rossiiskoi Federatsii, hereafter GARF, f. 9518, op. 1, d. 346, ll. 54-60 for a transcript of an early meeting between Zarubin and Lacy, October 28, 1957.

<sup>5</sup>Zubok and Pleshakov, *Inside the Kremlin's Cold War*, 174.



cultural and political level, the discourses of peaceful coexistence had started to take on tangible meaning.

While Khrushchev himself would have preferred to make outer space the playing field of the Cold War, as there the Soviet Union was a player of superpower status, the Cold War of the late 1950s boiled down to issues of consumerism and living standards.<sup>6</sup> By promising improvements in housing and lifestyles to the Soviet people, Khrushchev himself was partly to blame for this development, particularly as his 1957 slogan to “overtake and surpass America” in the production of meat and butter literally directed attention to bread and butter issues.<sup>7</sup>

In the context of both the cultural Cold War and the discourse of peaceful coexistence, the relationship with the United States of America was of vital importance as both the Soviet state, and to some extent ordinary people started to openly measure Soviet progress against “the American way of life.”<sup>8</sup> Around the mid-1950s, the American way of life was slowly turning into a global, and essentially Western, phenomenon. The socialist way of life was, as always, defined as the opposite of Western capitalist lifestyles. The attempt to fight against

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<sup>6</sup>Susan E. Reid, “Cold War in the Kitchen: Gender and the De-Stalinization of Consumer Taste in the Soviet Union under Khrushchev,” *Slavic Review* 61, no. 2 (2002): 211-52.

<sup>7</sup>Iurii Aksiutin, *Khrushchevskaia “otpepel” i obshchestvennye nastroyeniia v SSSR v 1953-1964 gg.* (Moscow: Rosspen, 2004), 350. For a further discussion about the slogan, see Rossiiskii gosudarstvennyi arkhiv noveishei istorii, hereafter RGANI, f. 5, op. 33, d. 38, l. 120.

<sup>8</sup>The discourse on the “American way of life” is present in archival documents from both state institutions and the Communist Party. In the late 1950s and 1960s, several books and booklets came out that aimed at introducing the “American way of life”—often from the perspective of Americans—and were to reveal the truths about the standards of living workers enjoyed in the United States. See, for example, *Amerikantsy ob amerikanskom obraze zhizni* (Moscow: Izdatel'stvo Znanie, 1959); *Amerikantsy ob Amerike* (Moscow: Izdatel'stvo sotsial'no-ekonomicheskoi literatury, 1959).

American influences was thus even stronger in the Soviet Union than in Western European countries that witnessed a similar influx of American influences at the same time.<sup>9</sup>

After Soviet tanks stormed Budapest in October 1956, however, the Soviet state had to work hard to convince both some of its own people and the outside world that the socialist reality was a worthwhile democratic and peaceful alternative. For this purpose, Soviet authorities embraced the 1957 youth festival as an opportunity to show the rest of the world the bright future of socialism. What could possibly go wrong with displaying the happy faces of Soviet and international youth on the broad avenues of Moscow? A great deal, and the Soviet leadership realized this. In order to prevent possible trouble, a strict system was installed for maintaining public order during the festival. The authorities were, however, faced with a dilemma. On the one hand, they wanted to maintain exemplary public order throughout the event, but, on the other hand, a peaceful, socialist democracy could not appear too controlling. Soviet efforts to monitor and control their guests' experiences were highlighted in the Western media as proof of the flawed system, but in spite of Soviet attempts to keep exemplary public order, the festival had some unforeseen consequences for the socialist state.

### **A Celebration of the Socialist Way of Life: The 1957 Moscow Youth Festival**

The decision to host the Festival in Moscow was reached before the return to repressive measures in late 1956. Even though the organizers realized the risks they would entail by

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<sup>9</sup>See, for example, Richard Pells, *Not Like Us: How Europeans have Loved, Hated, and Transformed American Culture since World War II* (New York: Basic Books, 1997).

inviting thousands of foreigners to Moscow, it was too late to back out.<sup>10</sup> The Youth Festival was instead celebrated as an opportunity to showcase both the advancements of Soviet socialism and Khrushchev's commitment to peaceful coexistence with the West. The festival provided an excellent opportunity to display socialist values and is a great case study for examining how the meaning of socialism was created, shared, shaped, and controlled in the Soviet Union.<sup>11</sup>

Western countries tried to send mixed delegations to the Moscow Youth Festival—mainly because of right-wing criticisms at home, which denounced the festival as an international propaganda scheme.<sup>12</sup> And surely they were right, for the Komsomol organizers wanted every guest to receive “propagandistic literature” about the successes of the Soviet Union and the life and work of Soviet youth.<sup>13</sup> They placed emphasis on the remarkable recovery of Soviet society from the horrors of the Second World War.<sup>14</sup>

Moscow, however, was not only expecting about 30,000 foreign visitors, but was also preparing for the arrival of over 60,000 Soviet youth from all over the country. In 1956 the

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<sup>10</sup>RGANI, f. 5, op. 33, d. 31, ll. 18-22.

<sup>11</sup>Social control is here understood as “the process of ‘the creation of meaning and the sharing of this meaning among [group] members.’” The definition comes from J. N. Mitchell and is cited in Robert F. Meier, “Perspectives on the Concept of Social Control,” *Annual Review of Sociology* 8 (1982): 50.

<sup>12</sup>The Soviet organizers worried about the “reactionary circles” above all in the USA, who would send their “agents” to the festival with provocative goals in mind. The Central Committee focused on the “necessity” for Soviet people, especially youth, to watch out for these kinds of influences. Rossiiskii gosudarstvennyi arkhiv sotsial'no-politicheskoi istorii, hereafter RGASPI, f. m-3, op. 15, d. 1, ll. 35-40.

<sup>13</sup>Sixth in a series of World Youth Festival, the 1957 Moscow Festival saw first time participants from seventeen African, Asian, and Latin-American countries, and it was the first time since 1947 that Yugoslavia participated in a World Youth Festival. Even though the organizers aimed at attracting non-European youth, Western youth eagerly took advantage of the opportunity to look behind the Iron Curtain and interact with Soviet people as for the first time since the Second World War Soviet people interacted with foreigners on their own soil.

<sup>14</sup>RGASPI, f. m-3, op. 15, d. 186, ll. 34-35.

Committee of Youth Organizations of the U.S.S.R. had issued an appeal to the youth of the Soviet Union calling for help,<sup>15</sup> and Soviet youth built stadiums and rail lines, painted and cleaned, planted millions of flowers, prepared concerts and phrase-books, and made thousands of souvenirs to exchange with the foreign visitors upon arrival.<sup>16</sup> National pre-festivals took place all over the country, with the smallest festivals taking place in factories, on collective and state farms, and in schools, offices, and colleges. In May 1957 regional, territorial, and republican festivals began, with finals held in Moscow; the winners at the national festival finals represented the Soviet Union at the festival main contests.<sup>17</sup> Besides exceptional sportsmen and artists, those who had delivered outstanding work to advance society were also invited to participate in the festival. The official Soviet delegation comprised 3,719 participants, but an additional 60,000 Soviet youths came to the capital as “Festival tourists.”<sup>18</sup> Travel to the World Youth Festivals, at home or abroad, was always a reward for good service to the socialist state, and the prospect of travel provided encouragement for Soviet youth to work hard in all their voluntary activities.

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<sup>15</sup>O. Bordarin, G. Grigoryan, V. Popov, R. Saakov, R. Vishinsky, I. Yefremova, and V. Zolotov, editors and compilers, *Sixth World Youth and Students Festival* (Moscow: Prepared by the Committee of Youth Organizations of the U.S.S.R., 1958), 22.

<sup>16</sup>“Moscow Denounces Youth Fete Critics.” *The New York Times*, Wednesday, July 24, 1957, D2, and O. Bordarin, et. al., *Sixth World Youth and Students Festival*, 23.

<sup>17</sup>John Hoberman, in his *The Olympic Crisis: Sport, Politics, and the Moral Order* (New Rochelle, N.Y.: Aristide O. Carataz Publisher, 1986) claims that the World Youth Festivals were Stalin’s counter Olympics. That view has been contested (see Hugh Murray’s review of Hoberman’s book in *Journal of Sport History* 16, no. 1 (1989): 104-8) but it is interesting to compare the propaganda effects of the two events, especially in relations to the fact that it was the Soviet Olympic Committee that organized the festival sports program and it was dubbed “Festival Olympics.” The Soviets, of course, sent professional sportsmen and women while others sent mostly amateurs. Understandably, this caused considerable frustration among participants. About reaction to sports events, see *Courtship of Young Minds: A Case Study of the Moscow Youth Festival* (New York: East European Student and Youth Service, Inc., 1959), 21.

<sup>18</sup>O. Bordarin, et. al., *Sixth World Youth and Students Festival*, 22-27.

The World Youth Festival resembled earlier festivals and celebrations in the Soviet Union.<sup>19</sup> As Malte Rolf and Karen Petrone have pointed out, the goals of the Soviet mass festivals were multifold and often contradictory—the Soviet state wanted to strengthen relations between the people and the state, but simultaneously sought to control and guide the population on how to behave as New Soviet People. The masses were to march and display the power of Soviet socialism through physical manifestations and acclamations. The Moscow Youth Festival, while similar in setup, presented several additional challenges to the organizers. For one, the festival was meant to celebrate socialist accomplishments and not to institute a new Soviet culture or celebrate Victory—the Soviet public had to appear convinced of Soviet socialism and its superiority as a governing system. Furthermore, the Moscow Youth Festival also had to appeal to foreigners, who had to be guided in how to experience and perceive the socialist way of life. For the first time, Soviet authorities were faced with the task of impressing a foreign audience on a mass scale on their home territory, and they invested much energy and organization in the event.

The task of presenting the Soviet Union as a progressive, non-aggressive, and democratic state was intertwined with an elaborate system of surveillance. The Soviet state and the Communist Party, clearly the leading actors in creating meaning in the Soviet Union, were also in charge of social control. Although the 1950s witnessed changes in many aspects, issues of surveillance and social control did not see major modifications until 1959, when the Twenty-first Party Congress called for the creation of Comrades' Courts and people's

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<sup>19</sup>Karen Petrone, *Life Has Become More Joyous, Comrades: Celebrations in the Time of Stalin* (Bloomington, IN: Indiana University Press, 2000); Malte Rolf, "Feste der Einheit und Schauspiele der Partizipation: Die Inszenierung von Öffentlichkeit in der Sowjetunion um 1930" *Jahrbücher für Geschichte Osteuropas* 50 (2002): 163-71.

volunteer squads (*druzhiny*), which were to “substitute organized social control for the courts and the regular police.”<sup>20</sup> Until then, the Communist Party played a leading role in issues of social control in the Soviet Union and was thus the main actor in organizing, overseeing and, maintaining public order during the 1957 event.<sup>21</sup>

The Soviet Ministry of the Interior (MVD) aimed at “exemplary social order” whenever foreign delegates passed through.<sup>22</sup> Toward this goal, homeless people, waifs, hooligans, and prostitutes were removed from Moscow, and prisons and temporary orphan’s homes in Moscow were emptied so as to have plenty of space to put delinquents during the festival.<sup>23</sup> Not just Moscow, but towns along the railroads leading to Moscow, as well as cities delegates planned to visit, such as Leningrad, Minsk, Kiev, Odessa, Stalingrad, Sverdlovsk, and Tashkent, were to see strengthened security and makeshift restoration. The trains themselves, traditionally a relatively free space in the Soviet Union, also saw strict control—foreign delegates should not witness any deviation from socialist behavior and standards. Furthermore, all trains were to be equipped with radios that would broadcast the festival program and practical information about life during the event.<sup>24</sup> This was without doubt also

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<sup>20</sup>Darrell P. Hammer, “Law Enforcement, Social Control and the Withering of the State: Recent Soviet Experience,” *Soviet Studies* 14, no. 4 (1963): 379.

<sup>21</sup>In the case of the youth festival, the Komsomol took care of the day-to-day planning and organization.

<sup>22</sup>GARF, f. 9401, op. 2, d. 491, ll. 150-55.

<sup>23</sup> Ibid.

<sup>24</sup>RGASPI, f. m-3, op. 15, d. 186, ll. 30-34. Here one can find information on how to decorate trains and ships, and stock them with games (such as chess) and movies for the youth’s entertainment. Train stations en route were also to see major facelifts. A station where the trains would stop for longer than ten minutes would sell periodical literature, a 15-20 minute stop would give opportunities for some meetings with local youth, and stations where a stop of 25-40 minutes would be made would see organized meetings of youth. The Komsomol was also involved in training the people who were to work with the foreigners, see RGASPI, f. m-3, op. 15, d. 186, ll. 1-11.

a measure to show off not only technological progress but also the modern and democratic nature of the Soviet Union.

Soviet authorities realized from the beginning that it would take more than slogans about peace and friendship to show the superiority of the Soviet way of life.<sup>25</sup> They needed concrete evidence and tangible displays, such as the Lenin Stadium and the All-Union Agricultural Exhibit were built to show off cultural and technological advancements of the Soviet state.<sup>26</sup> Foreigners were also to see a selection of factories, institutions, schools, and kindergartens in Moscow and Moscow oblast. The chosen showplaces were decorated especially well, and some of them produced informational brochures or films about their activities.<sup>27</sup> Sports was likewise a real instrument with which to show the strength of communism and the Soviet way of life; the Third International Youth Sports Games that coincided with the Moscow Youth Festival were an excellent tool to spotlight the prowess of socialist athletes.

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<sup>25</sup>That is not to say that slogans were not important during the festival. Early in 1957, the Soviet Ministry of Culture sent its recommendations for slogans to the Council of Soviets and a couple of suggestions for the themes and ways the slogans should be constructed. The slogans should, for example, neither be “one sided” nor hard to understand. Out of a list of forty-eight slogans that were suggested, eleven were marked as worthy of attention but it is unclear if only the eleven slogans met with approval from authorities. Needless to say, all of the slogans deal with peace, friendship and youth’s role in reaching the goal of a decolonized, peaceful world. GARF, f. 5446, op. 91, d. 299, ll. 18-20.

<sup>26</sup>In 1956, forty million rubles had already been earmarked for the festival, out of which 22 million rubles were earmarked for construction and assembling work. The All-Union Agricultural Exhibit was supposed to be accessible to foreign delegates and tourists in Moscow from June 1 - September 1, 1957. See Directive No. 1487 of the Council of Ministers from November 17, 1956: “O podgotovke k VI VFMS v g. Moskve,” RGASPI, f. m-3, op. 15, d. 1, ll. 23-25ob. This document also addressed issues of transporting delegates on sea and land, souvenir sales during the festival, and various other organizational matters and how they were to be taken care of by the various ministries in the Soviet Union. The organization of such an event took the collaborated effort of the complete state structure.

<sup>27</sup>RGASPI, f. m-3, op. 15, d. 186, l. 35.

As much as they could, the police monitored spontaneous interaction between Soviet citizens and foreigners. Early on, five foreigners exiting the Canadian Embassy approached an elderly Soviet woman (born in 1873) and offered her a ruble for bread. She answered that she did not need money and “lived better than they did.”<sup>28</sup> Parroting the official propaganda was of course favorably looked upon—it was the impossible act of monitoring what went on behind the doors of private homes and hotel rooms that left the police perplexed—but not powerless. In the course of several days, the police registered thirty instances of foreigners visiting Soviet homes and Muscovites entering hotel rooms of foreigners. Each case was reported to the KGB.

Out of fear of looking totalitarian, the police could not forbid foreigners to enter Soviet people’s homes, but the police reported the incidents to the KGB, thereby making sure that there could potentially be consequences for the Soviet citizens involved. Most often it seems that Soviet citizens were driven by their curiosity about foreigners and wanted to mingle with them on normal terms. What went on behind closed doors was often unknown. A man in Kiev invited a couple of Norwegians into his home and spent “two hours hitting the bottle” with them.<sup>29</sup> A Soviet tenth grade student invited an Englishman to his apartment, “located in a basement room,” where, accompanied by two other comrades, they “spent a long time talking.”<sup>30</sup> The fact that it was a basement room was somehow disconcerting—maybe

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<sup>28</sup>GARF, f. 9401, op. 2, d. 491, ll. 289-91. The woman then posed with two of the men and the rest took photographs.

<sup>29</sup>GARF, f. 9401, op. 2, d. 491, l.312.

<sup>30</sup>Ibid.



because it was not what the authorities wanted to present as an ideal living space for a socialist way of life.<sup>31</sup>

After the festival, the organizers presented city authorities with a list of frequently asked questions during the festival. The questions all had to do with the way of life in Moscow: How had the construction of housing changed after the Twentieth Party Congress? How much did people pay for an apartment? Why were there residential buildings in industrial neighborhoods? How much did a car cost in Moscow? Why did underwear and ready-made dresses cost so much in the Soviet Union? How much did a television set cost and how many TVs were there in Moscow? Why were there so few cafes in Moscow? Why did women do hard labor in the Soviet Union? Does Moscow offer “‘variety shows’ ...with girls?”<sup>32</sup>

Many foreigners were thus more interested in understanding the living standards of Soviet people than in viewing displays of technological advancements. On a bus tour to Tushino, delegates from Iceland and the Netherlands protested the planned tour to see dams on the Moscow River, asking instead to see the construction activities in the town and to observe how the workers of Tushino lived.<sup>33</sup> The request was declined and the tour proceeded as planned. Similarly, the police frowned upon (but were helpless against) uncensored photography and were dismayed when a French tourist staying at the hotel Tsentralnaia

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<sup>31</sup>Jan Prybyla concluded in 1961 that while living standards had risen since 1955, there were wide “deficiency areas, especially in housing and consumer services.” See his “The Soviet Consumer in Khrushchev’s Russia” *Russian Review* 20, no. 3 (1961): 194-205. Here, p. 205.

<sup>32</sup>Twenty questions were listed. Tsentral’nyi arkhiv obshchestvennykh dvizhenii Moskvyy, hereafter TsAODM, f. 4, op. 113, d. 23, l. 120.

<sup>33</sup>GARF, f. 9401, op. 2, d. 491, ll. 289-91.

repeatedly took photographs out of the shower room window of an unsightly courtyard filled with construction garbage.<sup>34</sup>

Many Soviet people were concerned about presenting both the Soviet Union and socialism in the most positive light possible. Muscovites especially were protective of their city, and one city dweller expressed disappointment when an Austrian delegate photographed three houses with grass roofs, pointing out that it was “shameful to photograph only bad things.”<sup>35</sup> In their final report about the festival, the police acknowledged the role of those Soviet citizens who had “actively helped the police in maintaining public order.”<sup>36</sup> Surely, there were instances of Soviet citizens taking it upon themselves to correct or even punish detrimental behavior during the festival, but no issue got as much attention as the question of socialist morality and the decadent behavior of young Soviet people.

One of the most durable public memories of the festival is the recollection of female promiscuity.<sup>37</sup> Overall, 107 women were arrested for “promiscuous behavior” (*legkoe povedenie*) during the festival and, judging by the lasting impact of stories about promiscuous Soviet girls, this was an issue that touched a raw nerve among Soviet citizens, some of whom took it upon themselves to punish girls who had “associations” with foreigners. Take, for example, the story of a twenty-two-year-old Soviet woman who took several walks with a West German she got to know at the festival. One time her girlfriend joined them on a walk with an Italian male friend, and that evening young Soviet men took

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<sup>34</sup>GARF, f. 9401, op. 2, d. 491, ll. 250-51.

<sup>35</sup>GARF, f. 9401, op. 2, d. 491, ll. 314-15.

<sup>36</sup>GARF, f. 9401, op. 2, d. 491, l. 431.

<sup>37</sup>Interview with Eduard Ivaniyan, November, 27, 2002.

the law in their own hands: “A number of Soviet youth told [the girls] what they thought about their conduct with the foreigners. Then they put them in a car, drove to the city of Babushkin, left the car, and sheared them (*postrigli ikh*).”<sup>38</sup>

In a discussion of sex and propaganda during the 1957 Youth Festival, historian Kristin Roth-Ey concludes that branding promiscuous girls was not the mass phenomenon that the public remembered and that these rumors were “intimately related to broader social anxieties about female sexuality and the end to Soviet cultural isolation.”<sup>39</sup> Societal fears of this sort are well documented in other cultures—foreign sailors in exotic ports have long been perceived as a threat to prudence and local masculinity, and discussions about such issues often take on a heavily nationalistic character. According to local discussions, women need to be “protected” from seductive foreigners and the national culture from foreign influences.<sup>40</sup> Whether the arrest of 107 women indicates that female promiscuity really was a mass phenomenon remains irrelevant. Rather, these rumors were symptomatic of a bigger problem—namely that the free intermingling of Soviet and foreign youth was worrisome and

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<sup>38</sup>GARF, f. 9401, op. 2, d. 491, ll. 376-79.

<sup>39</sup>Kristin Joy Roth-Ey, “Mass Media and the Remaking of Soviet Culture, 1950s - 1960s,” (Ph.D. diss: Princeton University, 2003), 74-75.

<sup>40</sup>This author recognizes the phenomenon from her native country of Iceland where the presence of American soldiers during World War II led to a so-called “situation” which involved intimate relations between Icelandic women and American soldiers. The “situation” has been greatly exaggerated in public memory. When US soldiers returned to Iceland in 1951 they were literally fenced off as their presence was considered a threat to Icelandic national culture—and masculinity. Among the strongest cultural reactions in Iceland was the early establishment of a national television meant to counteract the “Yankee TV.” It is also interesting to note the changed attitude in the Soviet Union, in 1906 the Soviet people were outraged to learn about the cold welcome Gorky and his mistress got in the United States, blaming it on American prudery. In 1957, however, the Soviet discourse had become remarkably similar to American turn-of-the century morality. See Filia Holtzman, “A Mission That Failed: Gor’kij in America” *The Slavic and East European Journal* 6, no. 3 (1962): 227-35.

the effects of the dancing in the street caused concern among those charged with maintaining social—and socialist—order in Moscow and the Soviet Union.

In 1956, Soviet authorities had already expressed their worries about the weak ideological-political training of Soviet youth—suggesting that youth was rarely exposed to

lectures, reports, and conversations about the successes and accomplishments of the Soviet people in building communism, about the advantages of the socialist system over the capitalist system, about patriotism, proletarian internationalism, about the advantages of vigilance and the rearing of a great social discipline.<sup>41</sup>

According to the report, party organizations were not giving the students enough guidance—leaving the education role to organizations such as houses of culture and youth clubs where the youth preferred spending their evenings “dancing to jazz.” As an example, they cited how a group of engineering students had organized a get-together and the youth spent the night (11 p.m.-6 a.m.) drinking and dancing to jazz with “solely Western dances.”<sup>42</sup> It should thus not have come as a surprise that some Soviet youth jumped at the opportunity to establish contacts with foreigners. While interest in the West had thrived among the *stiliagi*—a relatively isolated youth subculture—since the end of the Second World War, the post-Secret Speech atmosphere paved the way for the emergence of an “independent youth culture.”<sup>43</sup> By the late 1950s, “real ‘stiliagi’ [were] hard to distinguish on the streets from foreigners,”<sup>44</sup> and this suggests that the subculture had become relatively mainstream—youth

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<sup>41</sup>TsAODM, f. 4, op. 113, d. 23, l. 5.

<sup>42</sup>Ibid.

<sup>43</sup>Tanya Frisby, “Soviet Youth Culture,” in Jim Riordan (ed.), *Soviet Youth Culture* (Bloomington, IN; Indiana University Press, 1989): 1-15. Here p. 2. This followed trends in the United States and Europe, where youth as such was becoming a much more visual and present group with its own ideas and culture.

<sup>44</sup>Mark Edele, “Strange Young Men in Stalin’s Moscow: The Birth and Life of the Stiliagi, 1945-1953” *Jahrbücher für Geschichte Osteuropas* 50 (2002): 43.

as such was now an easily identified group with relatively universal ideas about fashion and popular music.

The youth did not gather in the streets and parks of Moscow only to dance, sing, perform, and hold hands,<sup>45</sup> but were also interested in discussions about political and social topics. Predictably, the Soviet organizers forced anti-Western discussions on NATO and colonialism, but they were not always successful in directing the discussion along the lines they wanted it to go. The main topic the Soviet authorities were sensitive about was, of course, the ferment in Eastern Europe, particularly in Hungary, and much effort was made to show that the Eastern European delegations were all favorably disposed toward the Soviet state. There was considerable anxiety that the Hungarian delegation might include some disloyal youth; several Hungarians without invitations to the festival were sent back at the border.<sup>46</sup> Any sort of behavior from the Hungarian youth that could possibly be interpreted as anti-Soviet was also reported, such as when a group of delegates on their way to Moscow dubbed Soviet girls in a dance ensemble “cows” in Hungarian.<sup>47</sup>

Later during the festival, when delegates from England and Hungary took a boat tour together, the English youth expressed their opinions about Eastern Europe: “They said that in the socialist bloc, there is allegedly no authentic, real freedom, and workers live at a low level.” Apparently, the Hungarians tried to correct “the falsehood of their views,” and the English “recognized the accomplishments of the socialist countries and their peaceful

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<sup>45</sup>The youth mostly hung out in the following places: Sokol’niki, Izmailovskii, VSKhV, Manezh Square, Pushkin Square, and Maiakovskii Square. GARF, f. 9401, op. 2, d. 491, ll. 319-24.

<sup>46</sup>GARF, f. 9401, op. 2, d. 491, ll. 221-22.

<sup>47</sup>Ibid.

nature.” The Soviets were dismayed that the English would “provoke” the Hungarians, who expressed “only friendly feelings” in relation to the Soviet Union, but they were relieved that everyone walked away talking about peace and friendship—the main goals of the festival itself.<sup>48</sup>

Most of the meetings between delegations were peaceful and friendly. The police reported on few anti-Soviet incidents but, judging from the reports, they seem not to have done much more than to note incidents of anti-socialist behavior. In reality, they were surprisingly lax in their actions. Soviet authorities realized that the festival would increase the risk of unmonitored interaction between Soviet citizens and foreigners and that, no matter how extensive the measures taken, a mixture of one hundred thousand youth was bound to produce unforeseeable results. As poet Yevgeni Yevtushenko remembered: “For the first time in my life, my socialist lips touched so-called ‘capitalist lip[s]’ because I kissed one American girl, breaking any Cold War rules. Not only me, many of my friends, . . . [were] doing the same . . . on the streets of Moscow, in all the parks.”<sup>49</sup> The youth celebrated their relative freedom during the festival and the rules of socialist public order were broken in many regards, but even this is not that surprising—the astonishing thing is that the police let most of these interactions go on undisturbed. The police watched and reported on deviant behavior all they could, but in the majority of cases they refrained from interfering.

The police were, however, much more worried about “speculation,” and, even before the event, they had arrested several people suspected of planning to buy foreign products at the

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<sup>48</sup>GARF, f. 9401, op. 2, d. 491, ll. 373-75.

<sup>49</sup>From Episode 14 of the CNN Cold War Series: “Red Spring: The Sixties.” Transcribed at <http://www.hfni.gsehd.gwu.edu/~nsarchiv/coldwar/interviews/episode-14/yevtushenko1.html>.

Youth Festival.<sup>50</sup> During the festival, they tried to control the trading of foreign goods by setting up controlled trading points (*skupochnye punkty*) outside of the main hotels where foreigners were staying. The guests quickly got down to business and, during the last two days before the festival began, or July 26 and 27, they had already sold various products, ranging from suits, underwear, pieces of cloth, and wristwatches, valued at 240,000 rubles. The majority of these products belonged to the Finnish and Polish delegations—a Finnish delegate sold 817 Pallas wristwatches at 270 rubles each and many Omega wristwatches.<sup>51</sup> Most of the action was reported to have happened in the neighborhood of Vladykino, where apparently many foreign delegates were staying. According to police documents, delegates from Poland, Finland, and Norway dominated the market. The dealers seemingly got good prices for their items (and sometimes their personal belongings):<sup>52</sup> 305 woolen sweaters went for 150 rubles each, 200 plastic raincoats for 65 rubles. A Swedish delegate sold 180 pairs of nylons for 25 rubles, while an Italian got 35 rubles for each of his 35 pairs of nylons.<sup>53</sup> Overall, 2,302,259 rubles changed hands at these legal trading points at the festival (July 24-August 11), and hundreds of pairs of jeans, nylons, and toiletries were now in the hands of Soviet citizens.<sup>54</sup>

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<sup>50</sup>GARF, f. 9401, op. 2, d. 491, ll. 150-55. The police “resolved a number of practical issues of how to prevent the machinations of speculators, currency dealers, peculators, and other individuals, who intended to use festival events and the arrival of foreigners for their criminal intentions.” Ibid., l. 152

<sup>51</sup>GARF, f. 9401, op. 2, d. 491, l. 268.

<sup>52</sup>GARF, f. 9401, op. 2, d. 491, ll. 296-99.

<sup>53</sup>GARF, f. 9401, op. 2, d. 491, l. 299.

<sup>54</sup>GARF, f. 9401, op. 2, d. 491, l. 432. As an indicator of the purchasing power of the ruble at the time, a typical men’s suit cost roughly 1,500 rubles and a dress from about 375-700 rubles in 1956. Cited in Roth-Ey, “Mass Media and the Remaking of Soviet Culture,” 66.

Black-marketeering also flourished during the festival. The police reported several instances of Soviet citizens obtaining things from foreigners—and sometimes trying to resell them. Upon return to her hometown of Ruz', a Russian girl who had been courted by a Hungarian during the festival sold gifts he had given her and was reported to the KGB.<sup>55</sup> The police cited students of higher education institutions as the most active in illegally obtaining things from foreigners—on August 6 alone, fifteen students (at least two of whom were Komsomol members) were detained for buying items from foreigners.<sup>56</sup> In most cases, the students were reprimanded and reported to their Komsomol chapter—correspondingly, factory workers were reported to their party cell. Another thirty-nine people were detained on August 8 and 9 for buying stuff from foreigners, among them students, workers, and Komsomol and Communist Party members. In these cases their Moscow visiting permits were confiscated and “administrative actions”—e.g., they were reported to their appropriate party cells—were taken.<sup>57</sup> As the festival went on, more and more foreigners seemed to have caught on to the great demand for goods, and the police repeatedly intervened when foreigners set up shop on the streets close to the legal trade points. They noted how they “touted buyers” and “outbid each other” in selling watches, toiletries, glasses, combs, towels, and other things.<sup>58</sup>

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<sup>55</sup>GARF, f. 9401, op. 2, d. 491, ll. 343-48.

<sup>56</sup>GARF, f. 9401, op. 2, d. 491, ll. 361-62.

<sup>57</sup>GARF, f. 9401, op. 2, d. 491, ll. 376-79.

<sup>58</sup>GARF, f. 9401, op. 2, d. 491, l. 365.



“I wonder if Khrushchev realizes what he is risking,” a member of the Polish delegation in Moscow told American *Life* correspondent Flora Lewis in 1957.<sup>59</sup> If, as Lewis speculated, the 1956 “unrest” in Eastern Europe was mostly due to the Warsaw Festival of 1955, the Soviet authorities should have been more worried about the consequences of the youth celebrating in Moscow. Not surprisingly, many Soviet participants later assessed the Moscow festival as a kind of turning point in the development of their own view of the world.<sup>60</sup> The contact with another culture, the very idea of having consumer choices, which was reflected in a wide variety of styles, contrasted sharply with the oppressive monotony of official Soviet consumer products.

Interestingly, the Komsomol worried about the potential isolation of Soviet youth, stating that “politically” it would not be advisable. It tried to make sure that the Communist youth intermingled “normally” with other delegations. At the same time, the Komsomol hoped to be able to control with whom foreigners would interact—they arranged for special meetings with “certain people” who would provide them with “concrete information” about whatever they wanted to hear.<sup>61</sup> It turned out that members of the Soviet delegation did not mingle enough with foreigners during the festival—at least they did not carry their Komsomol pins and were thus not recognizable as official delegates. The Komsomol concluded that it would

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<sup>59</sup>Flora Lewis, “Youth from 102 lands swarms over Moscow,” *Life* 43, 7, August 12, 1957, 22. The Soviet organizers were clearly worried about something similar happening. Pondering whether to organize regional meetings during the festival, they stated that while they might be of use, “they should certainly not be organized the way they were in Warsaw. No mass meeting, but a smaller Forum for debate. No resolutions!” RGASPI, m-3, op. 15, d. 191, l. 17 (in Russian) and l. 18 (in English).

<sup>60</sup>This is apparent in Aleksei Kozlov’s biography, *Kozel na sakes—i tak vsiu zhizn’* (Moscow: Vagrius, 1998) and the early novels and later works of Vasilii Aksenov, especially his *V poiskakh grustnogo bebi: Kniga ob Amerike* (New York: Liberty Publishing House, 1987).

<sup>61</sup>RGASPI, f. m-3, op. 15, d. 186, l. 37.

be “erroneous and politically incorrect” if the Communist youth were not more visible among the participants,<sup>62</sup> for the Kremlin was slowly realizing the power of personal contact. Although the authorities trusted the youth’s commitment to the Soviet state and wanted them to mingle normally at the festival, they were apprehensive about unwanted influences foreigners might bring.

It is hard to judge the impact of the festival, but in psychological warfare interaction with people is always the most useful weapon. The evidence suggests that, at least partly, the outcome of the festival was not the outcome Soviet authorities anticipated. As Fiona Lewis reported: “The easy camaraderie permitted for the festival surprised visitors but left Russians breathless with a taste of forgotten freedom.” It seemed that “the sheer presence of foreigners made more impression than their words. Wherever delegates appeared, the Russians thronged—to see how they dressed, how they chattered and laughed, how they sang, how they danced, how they flirted.”<sup>63</sup> The Soviet authorities were obviously concerned about the presence of foreigners in their country, but they had to accept the fact that foreigners talked to Soviet citizens and that they were curious about how the socialist state housed its people and other issues. The authorities realized that, in the end, the sound of rock and roll, the look of abstract canvases, and the softness of “capitalist lips” would corrupt Soviet youth more than they themselves could impress the rest of the world with slogans declaring peace and friendship. For the sake of keeping up appearances they—for the most

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<sup>62</sup>RGASPI, f. m-3, op. 15, d. 191, ll. 11-13. The documents on social control show, however, that often Komsomol students were visible and got carried away in their interactions with foreigners.

<sup>63</sup>Flora Lewis, “Youth from 102 lands swarms over Moscow,” 26.

part—tolerated the dancing in the streets of Moscow. But hosting world youth in Moscow had increased interest in foreign cultures and allowed for a Soviet discovery of difference.

### **“Be Careful, Premier Khrushchev”: Official Cultural Relations with the United States**

Early in the summer of 1957, Khrushchev started advocating publicly for an official cultural exchange agreement with the United States. He felt that the conclusion of such an agreement would confirm the Soviet Union’s superpower status on a par with the United States’, and he felt confident in the Soviet Union’s ability to show off its accomplishments. Intertwined with all of this was his continued emphasis on peaceful coexistence.<sup>64</sup>

Khrushchev pushed for the agreement even though he knew that it would entail opening up the country further to “dangerous elements,” or, as A.N. Shelepin, head of the Komsomol warned after the festival, “reactionary circles” in the West, who might try to “influence the minds of ‘backward Soviet people.’”<sup>65</sup> Khrushchev, however, also realized that “Western perceptions of Soviet life were dominated by the image of downtrodden women engaged in manual labor and that visitors took home the impression of a backward and uncivilized country,”<sup>66</sup> and he wanted to correct that image.

The American authorities were reluctant and did not immediately jump on Khrushchev’s offer but, later in the year, they agreed to start discussions, which lasted for three months and

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<sup>64</sup>Walter L. Hixson, *Parting the Curtain: Propaganda, Culture, and the Cold War, 1945-1961* (New York: St. Martin’s Griffin, 1997), 153.

<sup>65</sup>Frederick C. Barghoorn, *The Soviet Cultural Offensive: The Role of Cultural Diplomacy in Soviet Foreign Policy* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1960), 24-25.

<sup>66</sup>Reid, “Cold War in the Kitchen,” 224. She is citing Khrushchev’s election address to the Supreme Council: “Rech’ tovarishcha N. S. Khrushcheva,” *Pravda*, 15 March 1958.

resulted in the Zarubin-Lacy Agreement of January 27, 1958.<sup>67</sup> The “Agreement Between the United States of America and the Union of Soviet Socialist Republics on Exchanges in the Cultural, Technical, and Educational Fields” entailed exchanges in multiple fields, such as science, technology, agriculture, radio and television, film, government, publication, tourism, and exhibitions. The agreement was a first of its kind for the U.S. State Department, which had been sending delegations to the Soviet Union since 1957.<sup>68</sup> Private individuals, mainly impresario Sol Hurok, had worked since the mid-1950s to send Soviet artists and performers to the United States, and many American entertainers and performance companies, perhaps most famously the cast of *Porgy and Bess*, had visited the Soviet Union since 1955. About half of these events had been at least partly sponsored by the American government,<sup>69</sup> but the cultural exchange agreement brought with it new channels for cultural exchanges. The following years saw many cultural events and mutual visits of delegations, but the most successful outcomes of the first two years of the cultural exchange agreement were beyond doubt the mutual national exhibits in the summer of 1959, a Soviet national Exhibition in New York and, more importantly, the American National Exhibition in Moscow.<sup>70</sup>

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<sup>67</sup>Formal discussions between the United States and the Soviet Union started on October 28, 1957. The agreement is often called “the Zarubin-Lacy agreement” after its negotiators Soviet Ambassador to the US, Georgi Zarubin and William S. B. Lacy, head of the new State Department section called the East-West contact desk. Richmond, *Cultural Exchange and the Cold War*, 15; Barghoorn, *The Soviet Cultural Offensive*, 7. Hixson, *Parting the Curtain*, 155.

<sup>68</sup>Richmond, *Cultural Exchange and the Cold War*, 15 and 17.

<sup>69</sup>Barghoorn, *The Soviet Cultural Offensive*, 317.

<sup>70</sup>A protocol agreement from September 10, 1958, called for the reciprocal exhibits. GARF, f. 9518, op. 1, d. 595, l. 131. The American exhibition was a “joint endeavor of the US government, American industry, and other private groups and organizations. Government participation centers in the Department of State, the

The American National Exhibition took place in Sokolniki Park in Moscow for six weeks in July and August 1959.<sup>71</sup> Early during the preparation stage, it became clear that Soviet Agitprop experts would respond with all their might to crank out counterpropaganda as it became clear what the Americans were planning to exhibit in Moscow.<sup>72</sup> Toward this goal, the Soviet Exhibition of the People's Economic Achievement, or VDNKh, opened in February 1959, to "host additional mass events to attract visitors in July and August."<sup>73</sup> Not long after an American Circarama screen to display scenes of American life was built in Sokolniki, a similar screen was set up in VDNKh to draw attention away from the novelty of the Disney feature.<sup>74</sup> As the exhibition started, however, Soviet observers noted that it would not be wise to criticize it too much, and it would pay off to keep in mind that "this exhibit has gotten high praise in the thirty-three countries it has visited. Therefore, any petty criticism on our behalf might be used to harm us."<sup>75</sup>

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Department of Commerce, and the US Information Agency, with the Director of USIA, George V. Allen, serving as coordinator."

<sup>71</sup>For literature on the American National Exhibition, consult, Hixson, *Parting the Curtain* and Amanda Wood Aucoin, "Deconstructing the American Way of Life: Soviet Responses to Cultural Exchange and American Information Activity during the Khrushchev Years," (Ph.D. diss: University of Arkansas, 2001).

<sup>72</sup>The US organizers used many features from their successful display at the 1958 Brussels World Fair. The Soviets showed great skepticism of American declarations that the exhibit would not have a propagandistic character. See also RGANI, f. 5, op. 33, d. 95, ll. 5-7. Soviet authorities also distributed materials about America to Soviet journals and newspapers for them to publish in the months leading up to and during the exhibit. See RGANI, f. 5, op. 33, d. 95, l. 12. Finally, they planned a "major political and cultural information campaign among the population during the American Exhibition in Moscow," RGANI, f. 5, op. 33, d. 95, ll. 13-18 and ll. 23-32.

<sup>73</sup>Hixson, *Parting the Curtain*, 187.

<sup>74</sup>*Ibid.*, 188.

<sup>75</sup>GARF, f. 9518, op. 1, d. 594, l. 224.

Offering animated films and short documentary films about America,<sup>76</sup> an art exhibit,<sup>77</sup> a photography exhibit, a Bob Sullivan variety show, and a book exhibit, the American Exhibition troubled the Soviet hosts. The book exhibit turned out to be one of the most sensitive issues, as the Soviets disapproved of American books on Russia—claiming they represented anti-Soviet propaganda and were a breach of the agreement that called for representations only of one’s own country.<sup>78</sup> The issue received so much publicity that Harold McClellan, head of the American organizing committee, withdrew books from the exhibit in order not to divert attention from its “real” purpose.<sup>79</sup>

Soviet organizers of the New York Exhibition followed the preparations for the American Exhibition very closely. After American organizers withdrew provocative books from their exhibit, the Soviet planners recalled some items from their planned New York display as well. Books with titles such as *Negroes in America Fight for Freedom*<sup>80</sup> were thus removed from the Soviet Exhibition, but overall Soviet planners were satisfied with the reception the exhibit got in the United States, even saying that although Americans still asked various and challenging questions, they were “more friendly than hostile” toward the Soviet Union.<sup>81</sup>

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<sup>76</sup>A list of films and documentaries is in GARF, f. 9518, op. 1, d. 595, l. 227.

<sup>77</sup>GARF, f. 9518, op. 1, d. 595, ll. 255-57.

<sup>78</sup>There is much documentation on the book display. GARF, f. 9518, op. 1, d. 594, l. 217-20 contains a list of twenty one books considered anti-Soviet propaganda. Among the books are Leopold Haimson’s *The Russian Marxists and the Origins of Bolshevism*, George Vernadsky’s *A History of Russia*, and Frederick Barghoorn’s *The Soviet Image of the United States*. See also *ibid.*, ll. 232-34.

<sup>79</sup>GARF, f. 9518, op. 1, d. 594, *passim*.

<sup>80</sup>Timur Timofeevich Timofeev, *Negry SShA v bor’be za svobodu* (Moscow: Gos. izd-vo polit. lit-ry, 1957).

<sup>81</sup>RGANI, f. 5, op. 36, d. 88, ll. 234-41.

The Soviet authorities tried to maintain control in Sokolniki Park during the event, and over a three-day period (July 25-27) the Ministry of Internal Affairs detained fifty-eight people who had been caught stealing from the stands at the American National Exhibition. Among the detainees were a senior lieutenant, an engineer, students, an actress, a nurse, and a member of the Komsomol.<sup>82</sup> Books and cosmetics seemed especially popular; the authorities were right to worry about the attraction of the American items. The Americans were prepared for the appeal of their products, however, and each guest received a souvenir for keeps. The Soviet side noted that seven types of free souvenirs were handed out during the festival: a color-printed guide to the Exhibit, buttons with the American flag and the inscription USA EXHIBITION, a paper cup with the “refreshing drink” Pepsi Cola, an ice cream cup, 15 cm-long toy cars, powder, and lipstick (ten thousand lipsticks were to be produced on site every day).<sup>83</sup> Toward the end of the exhibit, on August 11, Harold McClellan expressed his overall satisfaction with the event, but he feared that “we had way too many cosmetics at this exhibit, which was soon identified with France and not with the USA.”<sup>84</sup> Still, targeting women, as was so famously done with the model kitchen and the emphasis on how the plight of the housewife could be eased, turned out to be a smart move. It drew much more attention to issues of convenience and consumerism—and lack thereof in the Soviet Union—than Khrushchev cared or wished for.<sup>85</sup> It was becoming increasingly clear that in addition to the space race, living standards and ways of life would play a role in

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<sup>82</sup>GARF, f. 9401, op. 2, d. 505, ll. 263-64.

<sup>83</sup>GARF, f. 9518, op. 1, d. 593, ll. 121-22.

<sup>84</sup>GARF, f. 9518, op. 1, d. 593, ll. 247-48.

<sup>85</sup>See for example Reid, “Cold War in the Kitchen” for issues of consumerism.

the Cold War. The Soviet Exhibition in New York City emphasized technology, for instance, but in an interview with the *New York Times*, Soviet guide Yuri Zonov claimed that most American visitors wanted to learn how people lived in the Soviet Union and “maybe 5 per cent of all the questions are about the sputnik.”<sup>86</sup>

In addition to national exhibitions, 1959 was a year of official visits. Starting in January, Anastas Ivanovich Mikoyan, Khrushchev’s deputy and close friend, visited Washington, New York, Chicago, and Los Angeles as a guest of Soviet Ambassador to the United States Mikhail Menshikov, charged with easing relations with Americans.<sup>87</sup> In July, the Soviet Exhibition was opened in New York City by Politburo member Frol Romanovich Kozlov, Khrushchev’s close deputy. In the same month, U.S. Vice President Richard M. Nixon traveled to the Soviet Union to open the American National Exhibition in Sokolniki Park in Moscow. And, within two weeks after the exhibition closed, Premier Khrushchev embarked upon a tour of the United States of America.

The American division of the Union of Soviet Societies for Friendship and Cultural Relations with Foreign Countries (SSOD) concluded that the year 1959 was a “turning point” in Soviet-American cultural relations,<sup>88</sup> not only because of the American Exhibition in Sokolniki, but also because Khrushchev toured the United States. The first full year of official exchanges did mark a change in Soviet-American cultural and diplomatic relations, because the focus of the Soviet mission of spreading the language of peaceful coexistence

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<sup>86</sup>“Guides Outdraw Soviet Exhibits: Although Difficult to Find, They Face Many Queries on Personal Matters,” *New York Times*, August 9, 1959, 9.

<sup>87</sup>William Taubman, *Khrushchev: The Man and His Era* (New York: W. W. Norton & Company, 2003), 409.

<sup>88</sup>GARF, f. 9576, op. 8, d. 27, ll. 158-74.



was now mainly on the United States. Events such as the American National Exhibition, Khrushchev's America visit, American performances in the USSR of *Porgy and Bess*, Holiday on Ice, the Harlem Globetrotters, and Bob Hope made the United States a focal point of the Soviet media, which in the mid-1950s recognized American technological superiority but emphasized socialism's ability to catch up with and surpass the U.S. Yet displays of cars and shoes at the American National Exhibition interested visitors more than technology, and the Soviet propaganda machine was hard pressed trying to mediate and control the responses of Soviet people to American consumerism.<sup>89</sup>

It was on the "joyous occasion" of Khrushchev's promotion of peaceful coexistence with the United States that many people in the Soviet Union sent letters to the authorities. Here I argue that while many of the letter writers expressed themselves in what we might call official Soviet discourse, the atmosphere of 1959 contributed to a comparatively open discussion about the nature of Soviet-American relations. For this reason, the year 1959 marks a turning point in the way that the Soviet public perceived peaceful coexistence with the former archenemy and how they articulated their thoughts on the relationship between the superpowers. To a certain extent, this shift in public perceptions may have had more lasting significance than changes in Soviet-American relations at the official level, especially since they remained volatile.

SSOD accredited the profound effects of 1959 mainly to Nikita Khrushchev's visit to the United States of America, which they estimated had "resulted in general changes in

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<sup>89</sup>Reid, "Cold War in the Kitchen," 239.

international relations and colossal influences on the minds of millions of ordinary Americans.”<sup>90</sup> The SSOD report even stated that

it would not be an overstatement to say that, for the first time since the war, the absolute majority of Americans heard the earnest truth about the Soviet Union, the absolute majority of Americans changed their minds about the USSR. . . . In hundreds of letters they expressed the admiration of the fruitful work, delivered by Comrade Khrushchev in the USA, and many asked to receive information about the Soviet Union, not believing the official American sources.”<sup>91</sup>

It is fairly safe to assume that SSOD’s estimate of Khrushchev’s popularity in America were strongly exaggerated, but the perceived positive impact of the Khrushchev visit on Americans was considered a great success among all of the Soviet institutions involved in spreading the “truth” about the Soviet Union. Arguably, diplomatic visits and national exhibits caught more people’s attention than any delegation or tourist group could, as the mass media in both countries feasted on these events. While the American media was naturally more skeptical, the Soviet media provided its public with upbeat coverage of peaceful coexistence and friendship between the two nations.

Contrary to SSOD’s estimates, however, 1959 likely provided a more important turning point in Soviet society than in the “minds of millions of Americans.” Khrushchev’s performance received unanimous praise in the Soviet coverage of the American trip, but the hostile welcome Khrushchev and his entourage received, for example, from East-European immigrants in the United States was dismissed as staged. The media generally described the American reception of the Soviet guests with great enthusiasm, emphasizing Khrushchev’s

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<sup>90</sup>GARF, f. 9576, op. 8, d. 27, l. 158.

<sup>91</sup>Ibid.

competence in dealing with the Americans.<sup>92</sup> The Soviet media also embellished its discussion with letters from sympathetic Americans who were ashamed of the unfriendly welcome Khrushchev occasionally received—claiming that they were the “real” Americans whose opinions one could trust.<sup>93</sup>

All of the Soviet institutions involved in spreading “the truth about the Soviet Union” considered Khrushchev’s visit to America a great success. SSOD was only one in a series of organizations whose mission included the promotion of the socialist way of life abroad. However, the mission of encouraging and spreading knowledge about the socialist system abroad was often an uphill battle, as the Western public remained relatively indifferent to Soviet culture and way of life.<sup>94</sup> Yet the visit was still considered a significant event by everyone who had been following developments in Soviet-American diplomatic relations, crystallized in such processes as the Geneva talks. With the 1956 invasion of Hungary still fresh on people’s minds, many justifiably doubted the integrity of peaceful coexistence, but the “spirit of Geneva” and Khrushchev’s insistence on friendlier relations made President Eisenhower reluctantly decide to accept the Soviet leader as his guest.<sup>95</sup>

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<sup>92</sup>In late August, a delegation of Soviet writers and journalists to the USA, August 11-23, 1959, reported that Americans were very much looking forward to receiving the Soviet leader. GARF, f. 9518, op. 1, d. 349, ll. 209-12.

<sup>93</sup>GARF, f. 5446, op. 93, d. 1321 is devoted to letters from abroad.

<sup>94</sup>Other institutions and organizations involved in assisting foreigners in the Soviet Union and sending Soviet people abroad were, for example, Intourist and the Committee for Cultural Relations with Foreign Countries of the Council of Ministers. The Soviet Information Bureau was very involved in the Soviet mission of spreading the socialist way of life to foreign countries and trade unions also actively participated in this missions.

<sup>95</sup>Taubman, *Khrushchev*, 415-16.

The Soviet population, fixated on “things American,”<sup>96</sup> paid due notice to the events of 1959 and, over a four-month period, from mid-August to mid-December 1959, the leadership received numerous letters and telegrams in relations to Khrushchev’s travels but also about the promising developments in Soviet-American relations. Public letter writing was common in the Soviet Union, and many letters are preserved in Russian archives.<sup>97</sup> All of these letters represent part of a continuing correspondence between the Soviet public and government, with roots in prerevolutionary times and extending far beyond 1959. The letters examined here were written partly in response to the American National Exhibition, but mostly the letter writers took out their writing paper in order to express their thoughts about Premier Khrushchev’s visit to America. Most of the letter writers only expressed their wishes for good luck and Godspeed, but some of the authors delved deeper, touching upon issues concerning Soviet-American relations. Many of the letters duly replicated the themes and formulations found in *Pravda*, but some of the letter writers acted within a perceived era of relaxation, and the subjects of their letters go beyond pure endorsement of the regime’s goals. The language of de-Stalinization is thus clearly prevalent—crystallized in praising the return to pure Leninism and the complete silence on Stalin.

The act of public letter writing in 1959 has to be analyzed within the context of de-Stalinization. The risk of expressing an opinion in a letter to the authorities was nowhere near as high as it had been under Stalin; letter writers of the late 1950s acted within this

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<sup>96</sup>Dmitrii Bobyshev, *Ia zdes’ (Chelovekotekst)* (Moscow: Vagrius, 2003), 210.

<sup>97</sup>My analysis has benefited from Sheila Fitzpatrick’s article “Suplicants and Citizens: Public Letter-Writing in Soviet Russia in the 1930s,” *Slavic Review* 55, no. 1 (1996): 78-105. Fitzpatrick analyzed several genres of public letter writing in the 1930s and while some of her analyses only apply to the period, many can be applied to the letter collection at hand.

different atmosphere. In form, the letters were public—these were not private communications between lovers, friends, or family members—and the letter writers, full of optimism and good advice, all seem aware of the public nature of the act of writing to Khrushchev. Because some of the letters discussed here were published in late 1959 in a popular book with a press run of 250,000 copies titled *Face to Face with America: The Story of N. S. Khrushchov's Visit to the USA, September 15-27, 1959*,<sup>98</sup> their authors thus entered a public space. Some, however, especially those who gave explicit advice based on experience with Americans or articulated opinions about Soviet policy and relations with America, were not published, while other letters were published only in part.

The letters were sent either to the Central Committee of the Communist Party or to the Council of Ministers.<sup>99</sup> The unpublished letters discussed here are all found in the archives of the Council of Ministers, where at least eleven *dela* (files) comprise letters and telegrams “concerning the reciprocal visits of Khrushchev to the USA and Eisenhower to the USSR.” The earliest letter was written in August 1959, but the correspondence continued throughout the year. A large majority of the letter writers directly addressed Khrushchev (“Dear Nikita Sergeevich”), but some also wrote to President Dwight D. Eisenhower (“Mister President”), Vice President Richard M. Nixon, or Harold McClellan, organizer of the American National Exhibition.

It is not clear what motivated the letter writers to write to the authorities, but since some of the telegrams came from groups such as factory workers and *kolkhozniki*, it is likely that

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<sup>98</sup>The Soviet version of the book, *Litsom k litsu s Amerikoi. Rasskaz o poezdke N.S. Khrushcheva v SShA. 15-27 sentiabria 1959 goda* (Moscow: Gosudarstvennoe izdatel'stvo, 1959).

<sup>99</sup>*Face to Face with America: The Story of N.S. Khrushchov's Visit to the U.S.A. September 15-27, 1959* (Moscow: Foreign Languages Publ. House, 1960), 474.

at least a part of the letters were engineered by Communist Party officials. Judging from the ubiquity of the practice of letter writing in the Soviet Union, however, it is also probable that many people took it upon themselves to craft a letter. Khrushchev's America trip was announced on August 4, 1959, and the visit immediately took on great visibility. When one flips through the summer and fall issues of *Pravda*, one certainly gets an impression of the significance of the visit. Even before the trip took place, it was taken as a given that Khrushchev's discourse on peaceful coexistence had prevailed: the Soviet media described the visit as a historic mission. World peace and peaceful coexistence depended on Khrushchev's being well received in the United States.

Although Khrushchev was not scheduled to leave Moscow until September, the America visit was one of the main stories in *Pravda* throughout August. Because *Pravda* emphasized the historic importance of this latest development in Soviet-American relations, the visit was eagerly anticipated in the Soviet Union. Many people wrote letters to *Pravda*, similar in content and form to those published in *Face to Face with America*. There is no way of knowing how many letters and telegrams Soviet citizens sent to the various media and governmental organs on the occasion of Khrushchev's America visit, but judging from the number preserved in the archives of the Council of Ministers it is safe to assume that hundreds, if not thousands, of people picked up a pen on this occasion.

People from all walks of life wrote to Premier Khrushchev and President Eisenhower. The presentation of self is generally through "conventional social stereotypes,"<sup>100</sup> such as

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<sup>100</sup>This is borrowed from Sheila Fitzpatrick, "Suplicants and Citizens," 81. It is also worth noting that comparing the concerns and topics to those discussed by Fitzpatrick's letter writers new themes are prevalent in 1959. This is mostly due to the occasion of the letter writing (Khrushchev's visit to America) but also because since the 1930s, World War II had replaced the Civil War as a major traumatic experience that people referred to when discussing their experiences, support and sacrifices for the regime.

that of mother, veteran, peasant, worker, or engineer. Some letter writers claimed, in good socialist fashion, to represent a Soviet collective and to speak on behalf of millions of people, such as a 22-year-old male from Tambov, who penned: “I cannot hold back the emotions which fill my soul at present and which I can confidently say fill the hearts of millions of people like me.”<sup>101</sup> It is worth noting that these people were not dissidents, and their goals were not to malign the Soviet authorities. Rather, mostly these were ordinary Soviet citizens, who used the discourse of peaceful coexistence to elaborate on issues of interest to them.

People of different generations wrote to Khrushchev, but the majority of people identified themselves as elderly pensioners or invalids. The pensioner frequently took out his or her pen to contrast the country’s earlier backwardness with the technological achievements of the late 1950s or to reminisce about the horrors of the Great Patriotic War.<sup>102</sup> The common experience they usually draw upon is the war, and the letter writers’ enthusiasm for peaceful coexistence may thus often be explained by their sincere hopes never to experience another wartime situation. At a Kremlin press conference on August 5 where Khrushchev answered questions about the invitation and the purposes of the trip, he also reminded the Soviet people of the wartime alliance with the United States, indicating that they were capable of cooperating and working together.<sup>103</sup> As we shall see, many of the letter writers seized this opportunity to be able to finally incorporate the American ally into the myth of the Great Patriotic War.

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<sup>101</sup>*Face to Face with America*, 529-30.

<sup>102</sup>*Ibid.*, 522-23.

<sup>103</sup>*Pravda*, August 6, 1959, 1-3.

The 1959 letters to Khrushchev can roughly be divided into two main categories. The first consists of endorsement letters, e.g., telegrams and letters wishing Khrushchev well or, after his return, congratulating him on the successful outcomes of the trip. Endorsement letters are laden with praise and admiration for the Communist Party, the Soviet government, and Premier Khrushchev, and, not surprisingly, the language of these letters relies on the official formulations and tropes presented in the mass media. Letters in the second category, opinion and advice letters, also draw on official rhetoric, but many of the letter writers express their (mostly positive) view of the events of 1959 as well as the processes leading up to them. Within the second category, one finds letters that address Christian values, some even discuss a civilizing mission. One also finds optimism about “catching up with and surpassing America,” and advice on how to best achieve that goal. What these topics have in common is that they are framed within a discourse of peaceful coexistence and a positive focus on personal exchanges. Furthermore, advice letter writers sometimes used their own experiences with Americans, such as living and working in the United States, to explain how they thought Soviet-American relations should develop. Touching on everything from extreme to everyday situations, the letter writers often drew upon their wartime experiences and everyday life in the newfound, post-Stalin socialist reality. Generally, there is a feeling of living through historic times—not just in terms of the importance of the Soviet socialist project, but also in terms of the perceived acceptance and recognition of the post-Stalin Soviet Union as an equal player on the world stage.<sup>104</sup> Finally, after years of isolation, Soviet

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<sup>104</sup>*Face to Face with America*, 533. Early public opinion surveys in the Soviet Union, conducted in the late 1950s, support my argument that peaceful coexistence struck a chord with the Soviet people who expressed enthusiastic support for it from the outset. See Boris A. Grushin, *Chetyre zhizni Rossii v zerkale oporov obshchestvennogo mneniia: Ocherki massovogo soznaniia rossiian vremen Khrushcheva, Brezhneva*,



participation in broader international life seemed like a real possibility—and so did reconciliation with the former American ally.

### **Breaking the Ice of the Cold War: Public Presentations of Peaceful Coexistence**

Celebrating them as clear signs of the supremacy of the Soviet way of life, the endorsement letter writers repeatedly praised the “twin achievements”<sup>105</sup> of Soviet scientists, the launching of *Lunik*, the Soviet space rocket to the moon, and the construction of *Lenin*, an atomic icebreaker: “The sending of our space rocket to the moon, the trials of the atomic ship which bears the great name of Lenin, arouse a feeling of pride in our country, our Communist Party, thanks to which backward Russia has become the advanced Union of Soviet Socialist Republics.”<sup>106</sup> Thus, Premier Khrushchev’s successful promotion of peace in America was viewed as a monumental move toward world peace and melting “the ice of the ‘Cold War.’”<sup>107</sup> In this metaphor, Khrushchev was given the task of introducing to the hostile Americans the simple logic of peace and friendship that would solve all tensions and end the Cold War. Relying on the language and propaganda of de-Stalinization, not only *Lenin*, but also Khrushchev, became an icebreaker of colossal significance.

The endorsement letter writers parroted official language and policy. This is evident in the emphasis on the twin achievements of *Lunik* and *Lenin*. Two days before Khrushchev

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*Gorbacheva i El'tsina v 4-kh knigakh. Vol. 1. Zhizn 1-aia. Epokha Khrushcheva* (Moscow: Progress-Traditsiia, 2001).

<sup>105</sup>*Face to Face with America*, 500.

<sup>106</sup>*Ibid.*, 504.

<sup>107</sup>*Ibid.*, 544.

arrived in the United States, *Pravda* celebrated the success of *Lunik* on the front page and of *Lenin* on the third page. The timing of these stories was certainly calculated to strengthen the image of the Soviet Union as a worthwhile competitor in the area of technology.<sup>108</sup> The endorsement letter writers often showed an enormous amount of faith in Soviet technology. In 1957, the success of Sputnik had certainly increased Soviet people's confidence. Now *Lunik* and *Lenin* helped to validate the patriotic feeling that no one, not even the United States, could beat the Soviet Union in the space race.

When discussing the United States of America, the endorsement letter writers often distinguished between ordinary Americans and American policy—expressing sympathy for individuals but not for the government.<sup>109</sup> An anonymous writer using the pen name “Leningrader” suggested that Khrushchev would praise “Americans themselves, while, as for the U.S.A.’s technological level, you had expected to see something quite different from what you actually saw, that all you did see makes you say in good Russian: ‘It seems the devil is not so bad as the cold warriors painted him.’”<sup>110</sup> The “Leningrader” continued:

I realize very well how silly it is for a passenger to be a back-seat driver. Still, what I want to do is not advise you—oh, no!—but simply ask you not to feel admiration for anything in America. To see the flaws in everything, even the best, and to say with an air of disdain when you see something we don't have: ‘Yes, perhaps we ought to use that.’<sup>111</sup>

This sort of advice on how to deal with the perceived preeminence of American progress in both technology and comfortable lifestyle went hand in hand with the Soviet party line of the

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<sup>108</sup>*Pravda*, September 13, 1959, 1 and 3.

<sup>109</sup>*Face to Face with America*, 492.

<sup>110</sup>*Ibid.*, 498.

<sup>111</sup>*Ibid.*

late 1950s. The Soviet line was to accept that—for now—the Soviet Union was lagging behind America but in order to catch up, the Soviet people would choose whatever they felt America had to offer them and would eventually surpass it.

All of the published letters aim at showing how grateful and satisfied the Soviet people are with their way of life and how they cannot live without peace and friendship with other nations: “Why do we live so well? Because the Party and the Government are constantly concerned with our well-being, with the well-being of all us ordinary Soviet people . . . We live wonderfully. We need peace.”<sup>112</sup> Expressing blind adoration of the Communist Party was a standard feature of these letters, as was congratulating Khrushchev on following Lenin’s teachings.<sup>113</sup> Many authors, especially women,<sup>114</sup> often identified themselves as “simple” people and then recounted their advancements in life, which the Communist Party had made possible for them.<sup>115</sup>

Many also compared life in prerevolutionary times with life under Soviet power. People writing about survival issues were often very patriotic and usually parroted the official propaganda of the Soviet media, proud to be Soviet and proud of the Soviet “way of life.”<sup>116</sup> The endorsement letter writer also recalled the suffering of the Great Patriotic War to place emphasis on how Soviet socialism had now succeeded in providing the Soviet people with a better life. Their lives had turned out much better than they had dared to hope, and for that

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<sup>112</sup>Ibid., 538.

<sup>113</sup>Ibid., 525 and passim.

<sup>114</sup>Ibid., 531.

<sup>115</sup>Ibid., passim.

<sup>116</sup>Ibid., 528.

they expressed their deepest gratitude to Comrade Khrushchev. Indeed, thanking Khrushchev for “everything” he had done, for his “dignity” and “for the difficult, tremendous job you are doing,”<sup>117</sup> were common formulations. Some also revealed their need for a father figure in the leadership role, reminding Khrushchev to take care of himself “for us, for the people.”<sup>118</sup> His role as leader was reinforced as enthusiastic Soviet citizens described his speeches in America, which were published on the front page of *Pravda* every day during the visit, with flattery: “never in my life did I read anything more interesting, wonderful, and sharp-witted.”<sup>119</sup>

On July 25, Nixon’s opening speech at Sokolniki had also been published in *Pravda*. Nixon’s claims about the well-being of American workers attracted much attention in the Soviet Union, and, over the next couple of days, *Pravda* deconstructed the speech, word by word. Nixon had stated that American workers could easily own a television set and afford a car, but the Soviet press countered his arguments by, for example, citing Americans who did not recognize the comfort of the American way of life presented in Moscow at the exhibition.<sup>120</sup> Several people took it upon themselves to echo the counterpropaganda in *Pravda*. Semyonov from Leningrad had read Nixon’s speech, “but it made no impression on our people at all.”<sup>121</sup> Others were more polite, such as V. A. Zavadsky from Orel, who found

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<sup>117</sup>Ibid.

<sup>118</sup>GARF, f. 5446, op. 93, d. 1320, l. 106.

<sup>119</sup>Ibid., d. 1316, ll. 96-97.

<sup>120</sup>Nixon claimed that fifty million American families had a private car, and that fifty million television sets and 143 million radios were in circulation. *Pravda*, July 27, 1959. For Soviet counterpropaganda see for example *Pravda*, July 28, 1959, 4: “O chem govoriat fakty: Po stranitsam sbornika faktov o trude v SShA” by V. Zhukov. Also *Pravda*, July 30, 1959, 4: “My s etim ne soglasny’ Pis’ma iz Ameriki.”

<sup>121</sup>*Face to Face with America*, 541.

the achievements Nixon spoke of to be “marvelous” but explained that the Soviet people felt no greed or envy—“we have firm faith in our Government and our Party and in our toil-hardened hands. If we haven’t got fifty million cars today, we’ll have as many as we need tomorrow. If we haven’t got fifty million TV sets today, we’ll have a hundred million tomorrow. And so on and so forth.”<sup>122</sup>

The American National Exhibition was a major event, and many of the letters mentioned it in passing. A typical endorsement letter writer adopted the tone of Soviet counterpropaganda to describe the exhibition: “our workers thought it was not at all what we expected. Either you are afraid to show what you’ve got, above board and frankly or for some reason you simply don’t want to. It is a fact, though, that we thought your exhibition weak. We’ve got to be frank and let you know that we expect more in the future.”<sup>123</sup>

Not surprisingly, the editors of *Face to Face to America* claimed that the published letters bore witness to the “political maturity of the Soviet people, their active participation in matters of great state importance. What they say is but one more proof of the real democracy of our socialist system, of the unbreakable bonds between the Party and the people.”<sup>124</sup> The Cold War historiography of the Khrushchev period has sought to emphasize the initial willingness of the regime to reform itself and overcome the crimes of the Stalin era. Clearly, people allowed themselves to reflect upon current events in the Soviet Union and abroad, but as it became increasingly clear that those who were overenthusiastic about Khrushchev’s Secret Speech or interpreted it ‘incorrectly’ were purged, playing it safe was perhaps

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<sup>122</sup>Ibid., 495.

<sup>123</sup>Ibid., 483.

<sup>124</sup>*Face to Face with America*, 478.

preferable.<sup>125</sup> It was only in 1959 that the state dramatically reduced political persecution and called upon people to take responsibility for themselves—and others. Thus, “the real democracy of the socialist system,” as the editors phrased it, was neither a stable nor a trusted thing in those years, and this partly helps explain the public presentation of peaceful coexistence.

The endorsement letter writers often showed some enthusiasm for warmer relations with the United States, but they highlighted Soviet accomplishments and superiority, unmistakably parroting *Pravda*’s language of peaceful coexistence in their letters. When the authors mentioned, for example, the Second World War, it was in order to emphasize the improved quality of life since then or to stress the proven capability of the Soviet and the American people to cooperate—they did not go as far as to embrace the opportunity to renew their friendship with Americans. The published letters were chosen because they emphasized the general accomplishments of the Soviet state in general, and in particular, the two accomplishments, *Lunik* and *Lenin*, designed to minimize the effects the visit to the West might have in the Soviet Union.

### **Experiencing America: The Possibilities of Peaceful Coexistence**

What the advice and opinion letters have in common is that the letter writers went as far as they thought possible with the new language of the Khrushchev period and flavored their

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<sup>125</sup>On the failed experiment in information policy following the Secret Speech, see Schattenberg, “‘Democracy’ or ‘Despotism’?” About the renewed intensity in political purges after the 1956 Secret Speech and the invasion of Hungary, see Elena Papovian, “Primenenie stat’i 58-10 UK RSFSR v 1957-1958 gg. Po materialam Verkhovnogo suda SSSR i Prokuratury SSSR v GARF” in *Korni travy: Sbornik statei molodykh istorikov*, ed. I.S. Epechinaia and E.V. Shemkova (Moscow: Memorial’, 1996): 73-87. See also Miriam Jane Dobson, “Re-fashioning the Enemy: Popular Beliefs and the Rhetoric of Destalinisation, 1953-1964” (Ph.D. diss: University College London, 2003).

endorsements with thoughts on the possibilities for peaceful coexistence.<sup>126</sup> The advice letter writer thus went beyond the language of *Pravda* and elaborated on issues of Soviet-American relations. They hardly mentioned the “twin achievements,” focusing on how the Soviet and American peoples might happily coexist in the future.

Several letter writers offered Khrushchev advice based on their experiences with America and Americans. Often didactic in tone, such letters were unlikely to be published, and, in a way, it is extraordinary that people would detail their interactions with Americans. Soviet letter writers always had to keep in mind what the recipients wanted to hear and what the consequences would be if those on the receiving end did not like what they read. As there is no indication that the letter writers in question were persecuted, one may assume that writing these letters had no serious consequence. It is telling, though, that letters containing advice or opinions were not published, most likely because they often revealed too much knowledge of the United States and mediating the responses of readers to such information would have been an impossible task.

Nikolai Andreevich of Moscow was one of those writers who enthusiastically described his longtime “experience with the American people” to Premier Khrushchev. Nikolai Andreevich had lived in the United States for seven years as a political émigré after the 1905 Revolution<sup>127</sup> and then associated closely with Americans in the Soviet Union for two years

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<sup>126</sup>The letters I chose generally bore these qualities. I did not select many endorsement letters in the archives, as the published letters satisfactory represent that genre.

<sup>127</sup>Khrushchev’s biographer, William Taubman, recounted the following story that happened during the visit to America: “When Khrushchev encountered Governor Nelson Rockefeller in New York City in 1959, Rockefeller needled him by saying that half a million Russians had emigrated to New York at the turn of the century seeking freedom and opportunity. ‘Don’t give me that stuff,’ Khrushchev replied. ‘They only came to get higher wages. I was almost one of them. I gave very serious consideration to coming.’” Taubman, *Khrushchev*, 40. His source is Joseph E. Persico, *The Imperial Rockefeller: A Biography of Nelson Rockefeller* (New York: Simon and Schuster, 1982), 5.

during the years of “the restoration of the national economy; when we invited foreigners, including Americans, to help us.” He had mingled with American workers and students, and this gave him “a basis to form a few ideas about the average (middle, as they say) American, representative of the American people.”<sup>128</sup> He listed the qualities of the people he had known—especially their hospitality and how “they love to receive and entertain.” Qualities and traits of the American people, such as responsiveness, cheerfulness, optimism, cordiality, and how free they were of pettiness also made his list: “I could tell you many interesting things about my individual and business contacts with them,” Nikolai Andreevich said, but he assumed that Khrushchev had already been briefed on such things.

What he wished for was that Khrushchev would have the “full possibility of seeing America and her ‘natural greatness,’ as they say, from within, the way she actually is.” For that to be possible, Nikolai Andreevich recommended that Khrushchev visit an old friend “of ours,” that is, a participant in the October Revolution and “a close friend of Lenin himself:” Albert Rhys Williams. Williams, a Congregational minister from Boston and a member of the American Socialist Party, had visited Russia in the aftermath of the 1917 February Revolution.<sup>129</sup> He had throughout the years been a staunch supporter of the Soviet Union and had, for example, spent April-August 1959 in Moscow as a guest of the Union of Soviet Writers. He would be the right man, said Nikolai Andreevich, to tell Khrushchev about America—“in a way no other man could.”<sup>130</sup> Clearly, friends of the Soviet Union—i.e.,

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<sup>128</sup>GARF, f. 5446, op. 93, d. 1309, ll. 137-39.

<sup>129</sup>See Albert Rhys Williams, *The Bolsheviks and the Soviets: The Present Government of Russia, What the Soviets Have Done, Difficulties the Soviets Faced, Six Charges against the Soviets, the Soviet Leaders and the Bolsheviks, the Russians and America* (New York: The Rand School of Social Science, 1919).

<sup>130</sup>GARF, f. 5446, op. 93, d. 1309, ll. 137-39.



fellow travelers or people who sympathized with socialism—would be able to present America “the way she actually is,” as a country where racial and social inequality were carefully hidden from the visitor unless he had the right kind of guide with him. Nikolai Andreevich felt safe in painting a positive picture of the ordinary American—but for an “accurate” picture of America, he recommended a socialist American.

One of the first Soviet workers involved in trade relations with the United States, Tsukerman had also lived there, but in the late 1920s. He had worked and negotiated with Americans during the years of the First Five-Year Plan (1928-1932) and considered it his duty to share with Khrushchev some facts about his work in America. “Maybe these pieces of information will in some way be helpful.” First, Tsukerman said, it is nothing new that the State Department considers the Soviet Union a “potential enemy.” In 1928, it was already clear in dealing with Americans that they were skeptical and put up many obstacles for the Soviets to do business in America. Still, in this distant time of nonrecognition, American firms showed great interest in trading with the Soviet Union and considered it advantageous to do so.<sup>131</sup> Tsukerman emphasized how some American companies, namely General Electric, Hercules Powder, Thomas Edison, Henry Ford, and a considerable number of businessmen, “strived for cooperation with us and willingly offered technical help to us in different branches of production.”

Furthermore, Tsukerman claimed that he and his coworkers, “a large group of Soviet workers,” had struggled to enlighten Americans, as they knew very little about the Soviet Union. They worked hard to refute State Department propaganda, claiming that the Soviet

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<sup>131</sup>The United States withheld diplomatic recognition of the Soviet Union until 1933. Increased trade between the two nations expedited the recognition process.

Union was not and never would be an enemy of the United States: “As our brotherly relations with the United States of America during World War II show, we never betrayed Americans.”<sup>132</sup> This kind of advice was meant to demonstrate that although the battle was seemingly uphill for the Soviet authorities, with the State Department skeptical of Khrushchev’s true intentions, some Americans were already sympathetic to the Soviet cause. One needed only to find them and spread the message among them: reminding them of the wartime alliance with the Soviet Union would surely benefit the Soviet campaign. This is exactly why the Soviet media emphasized the importance of getting to know the “real” American people—the problem being that “real” Americans were not representative of those Americans who were still skeptical of anything that had to do with the “Commies.”

This idea of briefing Khrushchev was a particular genre within the advice letter and was often used as a kind of self-promotion. One man connected to the oil industry for over thirty years offered to brief Khrushchev for his many upcoming conversations comparing the socialist and capitalist economic systems:

I selected numbers and facts, which with clarity and persuasiveness show the supremacy of our socialist economic system. . . . If you would find the time to meet with me, I could in 20-30 minutes familiarize you with my accurate numbers and facts. I am convinced that these materials would be very helpful to you. That is why I consider it my duty as a citizen to send you such a letter.<sup>133</sup>

In line with the constant, and not always favorable, comparisons between the socialist and capitalist camps, this man wanted Khrushchev to maximize Soviet accomplishments when confronted with American supremacy. In cases where Soviet “supremacy” was not

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<sup>132</sup>GARF, f. 5446, op. 93, d. 1313, ll. 126-28.

<sup>133</sup>Ibid., d. 1311, l. 7.

obvious—such as in the oil industry—people offered their expertise so that Khrushchev would be able to back up his claims with “accurate numbers and facts.”

Related to the briefing genre is the offer to travel with Khrushchev and represent ordinary Soviet people and thus connect to Americans sympathetic to the socialist cause: the “real” Americans. Among the several people who asked to be taken with Premier Khrushchev on the trip, some offered special knowledge or qualifications that might be of help to him en route. For example, a young man who spoke English volunteered his services as an interpreter during the trip. With the same goal in mind of reaching out to and appealing to ordinary Americans, people sent photographs of themselves and wanted them to be given to Americans.<sup>134</sup>

A woman called Chistiakova wrote a very sentimental story of a photograph depicting a Soviet and American soldier in Berlin at the end of the Second World War, and a reader at the Council of Ministers marked her letter as “deserving of attention.” She wrote: “if our countries can fight together against the general enemy of fascism, how can they not together strengthen peace?” Chistiakova concluded that, in her opinion, this photograph would come in handy for reminding American statesmen of the former alliance and reconfirm the need for peace and friendship, but since this photograph of her childhood friend and his American friend was very dear to her, she asked for it to be returned after the trip.<sup>135</sup> The Second World War was discussed in many of the letters as a defining event, but the inevitability of a renewed global conflict had been deleted from the official discourse: “The future, in

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<sup>134</sup>GARF, f. 5446, op. 93, d. 1316, ll. 98-99.

<sup>135</sup>Ibid., d. 1314, ll. 136, 136ob. The photograph is not in the file but that is no indication that it was returned. The letters are mostly copies of the originals although probably about half of them are originals. Sometimes both the original and a typed copy is on file.

Khrushchev's opinion, would be a cold peace perhaps, but hardly the Cold War.”<sup>136</sup> The Soviet people were clearly acting on this when they offered photographs of ordinary Soviet citizens or Soviet and American allied soldiers—realizing that the “cold peace” would be sustained with “soft weapons.” Nevertheless, this realization was only possible because fear of a renewed war was no longer present. Literally providing Khrushchev with soft weapons such as photographs, drawings, and poems thus represented a form of active participation in the campaign for peaceful coexistence. Some of the letters reveal, however, that instead of fearing a new war, people worried about doomsday and drastic consequences should peaceful coexistence between the United States and the Soviet Union fail.

For example, a letter written to President Eisenhower by Kulikova, a seventy-three year old pensioner in Tajikistan, recounts the events leading up to the latest developments in Soviet-American relations. Kulikova wrote about Soviet-American cooperation during the war. She recounted Cold War tensions between the two former allies, and then claimed: “it is worthless to think of why that happened” as “now we are embarking upon a time where the faith of human kind is in your hands.”<sup>137</sup> This is a common feature of many of the letters—Khrushchev had offered Americans peaceful coexistence, and it was up to them to accept it: “After all, Comrade Khrushchev will do everything he can in order to assure success and benefit humankind.” Now that Eisenhower had agreed to meet with Premier Khrushchev in the United States, there was hope that Eisenhower would react to Khrushchev's offer of peaceful coexistence: “Only you two can say: peace—and there will be peace.” And should Eisenhower fail to accept the extended hand of friendship: “Your

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<sup>136</sup>Zubok and Pleshakov, *Inside the Kremlin's Cold War*, 184-5. Quote on p. 185.

<sup>137</sup>GARF, f. 5446, op. 93, d. 1309, l. 110.

Cold War will change into a warm one, you will drown humankind with tears of blood, people caught in the crossfire will curse you and compare you to Hitler, and God will prepare darkness for you.” Kulikova not only predicted a day of judgment and an afterlife in hell, but she also asked him to listen to her, a “simple woman,” because after all, he was her “brother in faith (*brat po vere*)” and she his older sister.<sup>138</sup>

A few of the letter writers touched upon religion as something they had in common with Americans. Thus, Pedchenko, a kolkhoz worker from Ukraine, pointed out that the “creator of life” loved all people equally and should be glorified. Pedchenko focused on the “primitive” and “beastly” nature of the Cold War conflict: “we, Mr. President, live in an epoch of civilization, in an era of the dawn of reason of humankind.” He continued, “you both need to direct all of your thoughts and energy to establishing peace and friendship between our great nations, peace and friendship in the whole world. The countries—and their people, are children of one peaceful planet.”<sup>139</sup> Turning the campaign of peaceful coexistence into a civilizing mission also goes hand in hand with the long-term tasks of Soviet cultural and political organizations—the Soviet mission was always to spread a civilized, modern, nonreactionary way of life to other countries. Now for the first time, the mission extended to the United States, which until the mid to late 1950s had been unthinkable, as America as such stood for the bourgeois greed and imperialist aggression against which the Soviet cultural mission campaigned.

Coexisting with the United States and Americans did not, of course, mean that the capitalist world was better than the Soviet way of life. Soviet successes in science and outer

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<sup>138</sup>Ibid.

<sup>139</sup>Ibid., ll. 182-83.

space had increased the Soviet people's self-confidence, but consumerism, where American supremacy was acknowledged, was always a sensitive topic that the authorities tried as they could to mediate. Ivan Aleksandrovich from Kazan wrote a letter addressed to Harold MacLellan, organizer of the American National Exhibition, and copied it to President Eisenhower and Premier Khrushchev, where he discussed living standards of Soviet and American workers in great length. His neighbor had recently visited Moscow and went to Sokolniki Park to see the American Exhibition. The neighbor had much praise for the cars and the elegant American shoes, but most of all, "he liked how the Americans talked about friendship with the Soviet people."<sup>140</sup>

Like the endorsement letter writers, opinion and advice letter writers also reacted to Nixon's speech and the Exhibition of American life in Sokolniki. In his letter, Ivan Aleksandrovich recounted the American propaganda about workers; how American workers get paid a hundred dollars per week, how they could buy two suits for that money or 420 kg of white flour, and how they could own two cars. This was precisely the kind of propaganda that the Soviet leadership worried about the most, but some Soviet citizens wanting to give the impression of loyalty took it upon themselves to refute this, as is clear in Ivan Aleksandrovich's fifteen-page letter, where he recounted the details of his life as an ordinary Soviet citizen. Opposed to the endorsement letter writer, however, Ivan Aleksandrovich offered his advice on how to deal with the propaganda and emphasized the need for personal exchanges in order for the two nations to be able to happily coexist:

We, the Soviet people are happy if blue- and white-collar workers are financially taken care of and live very well in any country of the world. We want to live even better, we also wish the American people a better life, and if we are to become your friends, then

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<sup>140</sup>Ibid., d. 1311, ll. 102-87.

there is never going to be a war. Send us your workers, pensioners, scientists and engineers, sportsmen, artists, farmers. We want them to see how we work and to observe our way of life, and we will come to you to see how your blue- and white-collar workers live, to see your way of life and then there will never ever be a war.<sup>141</sup>

Ivan Aleksandrovich then narrated in detail how he had lived during tsarist times and how he lived now—comparing prices of white flour and general living circumstances. The increased comforts were of course all due to Soviet power: “And if there are still people abroad who say that some of us, Soviet people, want to return to the earlier ways,” they should rest assured that “nothing can affect us, because we do not want war, and we will never give up Soviet power or the banner of Lenin to anyone.”<sup>142</sup> Ivan Aleksandrovich’s poorly written letter contains grammatical errors, flawed syntax, and run-on sentences—but his command of the language of *Pravda* was flawless, not only in the way that he believed in Soviet capabilities to catch up with and surpass America, but also in how highly he valued personal interactions as a means to an end.

Another letter writer also voiced his belief in personal exchanges as a way of correcting the Soviet image abroad and, following the languages of peaceful coexistence, he sent “a friendly note” to all the people of the United States of America:

We have heard much about America and about the American people, and the Russian people have always been sympathetic to your people. But from the American side the wind has always been cold toward the Soviet Union. American people think we are a red plague. They look at Communists as their bloody enemy. But you, American people, are profoundly mistaken in this. Communist—it is the greatest word in the world.<sup>143</sup>

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<sup>141</sup>Ibid.

<sup>142</sup>Ibid.

<sup>143</sup>Ibid., d. 1319, ll. 50-54.

Many letter writers expressed a similar sentiment. If the American people could only see for themselves how the Soviet people lived and worked, they would immediately stop fearing them and support their search for peace in the world.

As previously mentioned, Khrushchev's visit to America was the occasion for writing the letters and explains the way they are categorized in the archives. Many authors, however, also took the opportunity to inform Khrushchev about their personal life and request something for themselves or for family members. I.S. Tretiakov, a pensioner in Gorky, was one of those people who complimented Khrushchev on his success in dealing with Americans and emphasized Soviet technological supremacy. But his long letter concluded with an appeal on behalf of his imprisoned son. Tretiakov had been widowed in 1943 and had therefore raised his son alone. He confessed to Khrushchev that he had "screwed up his son," who, in 1958, had been sentenced to a five-year prison term for stealing 127 rubles.<sup>144</sup> It is a shame, Tretiakov wrote, that "while all youth are actively building something, the son of an old Communist sits in prison."<sup>145</sup> He claimed responsibility for his son having lost his way, testing the grounds for his son to be rehabilitated.

Another letter writer wrote with a special supplication directly related to Khrushchev's visit. Before getting to the request, Dzhavakov from Rustavi delivered a long rhapsody for Khrushchev:

I only want to point out that among the people—and a nation consists of separate individuals, just as the ruble comprises kopecks—there are different forms of love for one's leader, one's boss. Some people love him in one way, others just love him simply, a third group loves him deeply, a fourth group, to which I also proudly belong—and not without reason—loves him warmly, fanatically. That is why even a

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<sup>144</sup>Ibid., d. 1309, ll. 169-71.

<sup>145</sup>Ibid.



prison sentence would give me joy, if I were sent there at your command. I say this not because of fear, not out of a wish to indulge you, but with full reason and sincerity. I repeat that with me there is an important reason for loving you fanatically. But enough about that. Please excuse me for letting the introduction take so much of your time.<sup>146</sup>

The request that needed all this build-up was no small one. Dzhavakov's wife had an aunt and an uncle living in America, and he was writing to see if Khrushchev would take his eighty-seven-year-old grandfather-in-law with him to America so he could see his children one last time. He claimed that while some might think this could harm Khrushchev's mission—the son and daughter having taken refuge in the United States—he thought otherwise and offered his opinion of why this would “have the opposite effect.” He claimed that “this will be of interest and in all of America, news spreads fast.” Dzhavakov went on to assure Khrushchev that his father-in-law was “still very strong, and he could drink Kaganovich under the table.” Furthermore, he knew “many old soldiers' songs” and spoke good Russian. Moreover, Dzhavakov made sure to ask that his grandfather-in-law, “father of two American citizens,” be returned to them unharmed and intact. “We have no one besides him.”<sup>147</sup>

Despite its tragicomic tone, this and other such letters reveal much about the Soviet people's belief in the value of personal interactions. The abstract term “friendship between nations” was given a personal twist as they thought up ways of making the American people sympathize with ordinary people. The opinion and advice letter writers often showed belief in personal relations and cultural exchanges, and many based this belief on former experiences with Americans. Unthinkable under Stalin, this sort of advice shows that people

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<sup>146</sup>Ibid., d. 1311, ll. 33-34.

<sup>147</sup>Ibid.

adopted the discourse of peaceful coexistence with the United States and, by relating experiences and relations with Americans, wanted to show that peacefully coexisting with them was a real possibility.

### **The Legacy of Peaceful Coexistence**

It was generally believed that Premier Khrushchev's visit was to be repaid by one of President Eisenhower to the USSR. This was broadly discussed in the Soviet Union—and in the letters—as an opportunity to display both technological progress and traditional hospitality to the outside world. But on May 1, 1960, Gary Powers flew an American U-2 spy plane over Soviet airspace and, after the Soviets downed the plane, the visit was called off and the Paris talks planned for Eisenhower's European trip were cancelled. Finally, the Cuban Missiles Crisis in 1962 dealt Khrushchev's peaceful coexistence with the United States the final blow.

In 1959, however, the letter writers embraced peaceful coexistence, for the possibilities seemed endless. The letter writers wholeheartedly supported the idea that, if only Americans would realize that the Soviet people were peace loving, ordinary people, peaceful coexistence would come into being and the “two great nations” would be able to understand each other—with the help of personal exchanges and individual contacts. In spite of the panegyric and parroted texts that some people wrote, the letter writers hoped for a permanent thaw in superpower relations. Furthermore, some of their stories addressed recently lifted taboos of real political significance, such as stories of working abroad, of émigrés, production and industry, the nature of consumerism, and religion and thus show that the atmosphere had considerably changed in the Soviet Union.

Still, judging from the tone of the letters, it is likely that the letter writers exercised strong self-censorship.<sup>148</sup> What shines through is vigorous self-fashioning accommodating the discourse of peaceful coexistence and adapting to the relative relaxation of the post Secret-Speech era. The style of the letters takes after the changed tone of the Soviet media and other official language, which people seem to have intuitively co-opted as their own. Considering how many elderly people wrote to Premier Khrushchev on the eve of his trip to America, it is also likely that they were relieved not to have to worry about another war—they wanted to have peace of mind as well as peace and friendship between the two nations. The return to Leninism also marked a return to the times when the United States was—in some areas—seen as a model in production and industry. Many letter writers seemed to long for the time when the Soviet Union would eventually catch up with and surpass America.

Memories of the year 1959, particularly memories of Sokolniki and of Khrushchev in America, became important reference points as the Soviet people later looked back on their discovery of America and the West. Peaceful coexistence succeeded in changing the official discourse about the United States, bringing new ways of experiencing America to the forefront. The Stalinist image of the former American war ally as a warmonger and potential aggressor receded, and, instead, a well-to-do, inviting America was presented. Soviet citizens thus contributed to the campaign for peaceful coexistence. They may have done so purely out of patriotism, but they may also have embraced the concept of peaceful coexistence because it seemed reasonable to them.

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<sup>148</sup>Like Jochen Hellbeck's diarists, the letter writers "situated their personal, and particular, existence with respect to the general public interest" (357). Jochen Hellbeck, "Working, Struggling, Becoming: Stalin-Era Autobiographical Texts," *Russian Review* 60, no. 3 (2001): 340-59.

The repeated references to the Second World War suggest that at least some people were relieved that they were allowed to include the alliance with the United States in the powerful myth of the Great Patriotic War in the Soviet Union. They also indicate that hopes for peaceful coexistence between the two countries were earnest—people wanted to live without the fear of a war between the Soviet Union and the United States. When relations cooled again, newfound memories of the United States could not easily be extinguished. Despite the failure of peaceful coexistence as such, Soviet-American cultural relations of the post-Stalin period and above all, the changes in the discourse about the United States, had a deep impact on the Soviet people and their perceptions of America. The strategy of celebrating socialism while controlling people's experiences of it backfired. Allowing for displays of Western youth fashion and an American model kitchen in the heart of Moscow turned out to have lasting effects on the Soviet public.

## Conclusion

When I began the project of investigating Soviet perceptions of America, I wanted to find Soviet people's voices. I was not interested in what Soviet authorities thought about the United States, suspecting that the official image would prove monolithic and dogmatic. Upon realizing the difficulty of finding the "true" voices of the Soviet people, however, I started looking for them by reading bureaucratic sources. There I found that Soviet authorities created and promoted their own myths about the United States. Under Stalin, an anti-American campaign set the tone for the way America should be discussed and experienced, but Khrushchev softened this image somewhat by advocating peaceful coexistence with the United States and the West in the mid-1950s. More importantly, I also found that I could discern popular views in the behavior of the authorities toward the people.<sup>1</sup>

The Soviet state's decision to prosecute and imprison people who spoke favorably about the United States—and thereby critically of the USSR—is extremely telling: Soviet authorities feared that positive public perceptions of America equaled less support for the socialist project. They worried about the questions Soviet citizens posed about America during party meetings, interpreting them as lack of support for the Soviet leadership. Later, they worried about the content of American propaganda, especially the journal *Amerika* and the Voice of America, whose talk about living standards and freedom of speech seemed to

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<sup>1</sup>Vladimir Shlapentokh, *Public and Private Life of the Soviet People: Changing Values in Post-Stalin Russia* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1989), 21.

strike a responsive chord among some people. In addition, they worried about their ability to counter American propaganda. Most of all, Soviet authorities worried when people favorably compared the United States with the Soviet Union, for this suggested that foreign influences corrupted their people, not only culturally but politically. Without a doubt, many people accepted the official Soviet discourse about America. The nature of Soviet control over culture and propaganda meant that the authorities rarely worried about those who remained silent. The Soviet state and Communist Party focused on those who countered the official myth of America. A popular Soviet anecdote shows how Soviet citizens made fun of the official discourses about America, indicating that at least some of the fears of Soviet authorities were justified:

A teacher was quizzing her pupils on the difference between decadent, Capitalist America and Socialist Russia.

‘Tell us, Ivan,’ she asked. ‘What is the United States like?’

‘The United States is a Capitalist country where millions of people are unemployed and where millions of others are starving,’ he recited.

‘That is very good, Ivan. Now, Sasha, you tell us what is the goal of the Soviet Union?’

‘To Catch up with the United States.’<sup>2</sup>

This dissertation has looked at sources of information about the United States that influenced Soviet citizens and helped them form perceptions of America between 1945 and 1959. It has argued that during a time when the Soviet people were bombarded with mostly negative information about the United States, they also drew on earlier knowledge about the United States, memories of the wartime alliance, alternative sources of information, and increased interaction with American culture and ideas in the 1950s to form a counter-myth of America. Even if the state was reluctant to admit it, the counter-myth of America

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<sup>2</sup>Algis Ruksenas, *Is That You Laughing Comrade? The World's Best Russian (Underground) Jokes* (Secaucus, NJ: Citadel Press, 1986), 150.

contributed to the way the Soviet state organized its own propaganda. Eventually, the counter-myth contributed to the realization at the state level that bankrupt Soviet propaganda needed to be overhauled.

In this period, cultural relations with the United States almost completely died out, then went through a recovery and rehabilitation. This sequence of events involved advances, retreats, and rapprochements from both sides. But the most important change came when Soviet cultural officials realized that their mission of “telling the truth” about Soviet socialism was fundamentally flawed. VOKS/SSOD officials and Soviet Embassy workers in Washington repeatedly tried to point out that the Soviet state’s propaganda was ineffective. But although they reported an urgent need for good material about daily life in the Soviet Union, they lacked the courage to state—or simply did not see—the real problem: Red Square marches and pictures of party congresses did not appeal to the majority of Americans. In fact, such images did not even appeal to many people in the Soviet Union.

No amount of Soviet propaganda could cover up the fact that the Soviet Union could not match American images of plenty. What this suggests is that the foundation of the Soviet myth was problematic. The Soviet state worked hard to limit the influence of undesired information about the United States and the “American way of life.” It did this because it feared losing the support of its people and their belief in the project of building true socialism. With increased cultural contacts, Soviet authorities had to overcome some of their anxiety, slowly realizing that when it came to propaganda, they could actually learn from the Americans. Once Soviet cultural officials learned how best to present the Soviet Union to Americans, they understood that in order to make an impression on foreigners, *service* had to play a role. Full of confidence, Khrushchev opened up his country to Western youth in 1957,

but, as it turned out, it was too early. The majority of the foreign guests were not fooled by the Potemkin village, and the relatively uncontrolled atmosphere allowed Soviet youth to interact freely with the foreign visitors, often resulting in the Soviet realization that life was better elsewhere.

The American National Exhibition and Khrushchev's America trip in 1959 confirmed to both the Soviet leadership and people that the United States provided comforts and goods that the Soviet people could only dream of. The American Exhibit in Sokolniki Park in Moscow brought new ways of experiencing America to the forefront. In the aftermath of the fateful summer and early fall of 1959, Soviet authorities started realizing that focusing on technological discoveries and education was not going to be sufficient—for neither American nor Soviet audiences. Shortly after Khrushchev's America trip, on October 16, 1959, the Central Committee and the Council of Ministers issued a resolution "to raise production, increase variety, and improve consumer and household goods." The resolution stated that "the production of consumer goods had lagged behind the wishes of the population. There were too few television sets, pianos, washing machines, sewing machines, refrigerators; the shortage of mincing machines, crockery and irons was particularly stressed."<sup>3</sup> In the 1950s, America remained a capitalist enemy, but one that forced the Soviet state to take into account the demand for consumer goods when designing domestic policy.

The Soviet downing of the American U2 spyplane in 1960 and the 1962 Cuban Missile Crisis strained official Soviet-American relations, but some of the results of 1959 could not be reversed. In their book about the *shestidesiatniki*, the generation that came of age during

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<sup>3</sup>Wolfgang Leonhard, *The Kremlin Since Stalin*. Translated from the German by Elizabeth Wiskemann and Marian Jackson (New York: Frederick A. Praeger, 1962), 347.



the 1960s, Petr Vail' and Alexander Genis claim that "the *shestidesiatniki* did not know America, but they believed in it."<sup>4</sup> In the 1960s, American writer Ernest Hemingway became an underground hero, and American rock and pop music circulated ever more in illegal copies, as did jeans and T-shirts.<sup>5</sup> Despite strained political relations in the 1960s, interest in American culture grew with increased flow of American artists and cultural artifacts to the Soviet Union.

It has been said that by the late 1970s, the majority of the Soviet people "maintained negative or non-supportive attitudes about U.S. foreign policies." Still, the same majority believed in the success of the capitalist social system and economy, and most people embraced the ideals of American materialism.<sup>6</sup> After Mikhail Gorbachev came to power in 1985, the anti-American discourse softened and soon disappeared. In 1991, Boris Yeltsin officially declared that Russia was to embark upon a pro-Western path. Economic difficulties, however, brought disillusionment. Some had expected the United States to provide economic aid and therefore blamed Americans for Russia's slow development.<sup>7</sup>

Still, Russians initially responded with sympathy and shock to the terrorist attacks on New York and Washington on September 11, 2001. But within a couple of months, the Russian media adopted an aggressive tone against the United States and the military response in

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<sup>4</sup>Petr Vail and Aleksandr Genis, *60e—mir sovetskogo cheloveka* (Ann Arbor: Ardis, 1988).

<sup>5</sup>For a good overview of Soviet cultural perceptions of the United States see Marsha Siefert, "From Cold War to Wary Peace: American Culture in the USSR and Russia," in Alexander Stephan, ed., *The Americanization of Europe: Culture, Diplomacy, and Anti-Americanism after 1945* (New York: Berghahn Books, 2006): 185-217.

<sup>6</sup>Eric Shiraev, "Russia's Views of America in a Historic Perspective," in Vladimir Shlapentokh, Joshua Woods, and Eric Shiraev, eds., *America: Sovereign Defender or Cowboy Nation* (Burlington, VT: Ashgate Publishing Company, 2005), 46.

<sup>7</sup>Shiraev, "Russia's Views of America," 46-47.

Afghanistan. Soon, Russian reports about America depicted “a faceless, arrogant, and greedy monster, an image far too familiar to those who lived in the Soviet Union during the Cold War.”<sup>8</sup> What cannot be reversed, however, is the fact that many Russian people now wear Nikes and Reeboks. They drink Coca Cola and eat McDonald’s hamburgers, and they listen to Britney Spears and watch American blockbuster movies. Gone are the times when control over culture was absolute and free trade nonexistent. In a way, Russian reactions to America are nowadays more in line with contemporary Western European responses where, simply put, official views of American foreign policy change with elected governments and domestic priorities, and many people consume American goods without linking them to ideas of democracy or freedom.

Studies of “Americanization” usually follow one of two patterns: Either they are celebratory accounts of the successes of American culture in breaking down dictatorships<sup>9</sup> or they seek to show how American culture was fought against, adapted, and then “localized” so that it could exist within national cultures. Unlike in Western European countries, where cultural Americanization was simultaneously detested, embraced, and localized by authorities, the Soviet state rejected the American way of life. American culture remained very attractive to part of the Soviet populace, however, and in the postwar period the Soviet authorities were hostile toward American cultural efforts. I maintain that internal Soviet reactions to American images as well as official anti-American propaganda reveal much

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<sup>8</sup>Eric Shiraev, “‘Sorry, but...’: Russia’s Responses in the Wake of 9/11,” in Vladimir Shlapentokh, Joshua Woods, and Eric Shiraev, eds., *America: Sovereign Defender or Cowboy Nation* (Burlington, VT: Ashgate Publishing Company, 2005), 66.

<sup>9</sup>Timothy W. Ryback, *Rock Around the Bloc: A History of Rock Music in Eastern Europe and the Soviet Union* (New York and Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1990).

about the Soviet system as such. The Soviet “propaganda state” tried to shape and control images about the outside world in the Soviet Union, and it failed in its mission. Starting with World War II, Soviet authorities could not fully control personal interactions between Soviet and American people, and it became increasingly more difficult to convince Soviet audiences that America and its people were corrupt, evil capitalists. Furthermore, while Soviet authorities worked hard to limit access to American culture, they were also concerned about the picture they projected of themselves—both to their own people and to foreigners. The Soviet state spent much energy promoting socialist achievements. Internal definitions of Soviet reality thus became especially important as the Soviet authorities built up their own propaganda program in order to fight the effects of American cultural propaganda. The attempt to control Soviet reality and foreign influences on it was doomed by 1959.

Even during a highly politicized anti-American campaign in a “closed” society, ordinary Soviet people as well as Soviet cultural officials had access to alternative information about America that helped form opinions about the United States and the Soviet Union. America influenced the way Soviet authorities presented Soviet socialism, at home and abroad, and America shaped how Soviet people thought about domestic Soviet realities and the outside world. Despite efforts to control perceptions, Soviet propaganda about the United States as well as Soviet efforts to celebrate socialism only met with partial success: with growing knowledge about the American other came the realization that neither Soviet nor American life corresponded with Kremlin propaganda. Whatever its accuracy, the image many ordinary people had of America as a land of freedom and abundance came about as the Soviet state failed to fulfill their hopes and to meet their needs. Similarly, the failure of the Soviet state to present socialism in an attractive, modern way caused those who represented

the Soviet Union abroad to conclude that Soviet socialism had a way to go before catching up with America. Busy keeping up appearances, the Soviet leadership slowly took notice of the counter-myths and started paying more attention to mending the deficiencies of Soviet socialism. Whether or not it was too late is for others to judge.

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- f. A-461 State Prosecutor of the Russian Federation
- f. R-5283 Soviet All-Union Society for Cultural Relations with Foreign Countries (VOKS)
- f. R-5446 Council of People's Commissars/Council of Ministers
- f. R-8131 State Prosecutor of the Soviet Union
- f. R-9401 Special Files (*osobyie papki*) of Stalin and Molotov
- f. R-9415 Main Police Administration of the Ministry of Internal Affairs
- f. R-9518 The Council of Ministers' State Committee for Cultural Relations with Foreign Countries
- f. R-9576 Union of Soviet Societies for Friendship and Cultural Relations with Foreign Countries (SSOD)
- f. R-9612 Intourist

#### *Obshchestvennoe dvizhenie Memorial' (Archives of Memorial)*

Viktor Mikhailovich Lukin's Memoir in Manuscript (Uncatalogued)

#### *Rossiiskii gosudarstvennyi arkhiv literatury i iskusstva (Russian State Archive of Literature and Art)*

- f. 631 Soviet Writer's Union
  - op. 14 Foreign Commission
  - op. 26 Foreign Commission (1951-56)

#### *Rossiiskii gosudarstvennyi arkhiv noveishei istorii (Russian State Archive of Contemporary History)*

- f. 5 Apparat of the Central Committee of the Communist Party of the Soviet Union
  - op. 30 General Department
  - op. 33 Department for Propaganda and Agitation in the Soviet Republics
  - op. 36 Department of Culture

#### *Rossiiskii gosudarstvennyi arkhiv sotsial'no-politicheskoi istorii (Russian State Archive of Socio-Political History)*

- f. 17 Central Committee of the Communist Party of the Soviet Union
  - op. 88 Information Sector of the Organizational-Instructional Section
  - op. 125 Agitation and Propaganda (1939-48)
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f. 82 Viacheslav Mikhailovich Molotov

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f. m-3 Committee of Youth Organizations (1956-91)  
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